Public Housing and School Choice in a Gentrified City

Youth Experiences of Uneven Opportunity

Molly Vollman Makris

Palgrave Studies in Urban Education

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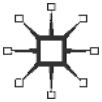

PUBLIC HOUSING AND SCHOOL CHOICE IN A GENTRIFIED CITY

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To Eileen Penelope, my adorable and amusing research assistant.
I love you

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Series Foreword

Education has remained a hotly debated topic throughout the history of the United States. Over the last fifty years, scholars, policymakers, and the general public have placed a particular focus on urban education issues. This is in part due to the struggle of urban school districts to achieve similar results as their often more affluent suburban counterparts and also due to the increasing proportion of our nation's children who are educated in cities. This series provides a forum for social scientists and historians to address the myriad issues in urban education.

Urban schools mirror the social problems of the cities in which they are situated. Similar to the communities in which they are located, many urban schools are unsafe and lack the resources and human capital that are necessary to succeed. Additionally, structures in our society place added burdens on the significant number of poor and minority children in urban schools and create obstacles to their academic success.

Empirical analysis demonstrates an undeniable relationship between socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity, and educational achievement. Children from families with low socioeconomic status have lower educational attainment than their counterparts from higher socioeconomic backgrounds. Black and Hispanic students have lower academic achievement than Asian-American and White students. Given the high percentage of Black and Hispanic students living in poverty who attend schools in cities, urban education systems struggle to produce similar results to suburban school districts.

Low student achievement and high dropout rates have become endemic to urban school systems. Many cities have dropout rates at or above forty percent and mathematics and reading proficiency rates below fifty percent. Because of unconscionable statistics such as these, policymakers and scholars have engaged in an effort both to understand the roots of failure in urban schools and to develop reforms that resolve the problems.

While some scholars and policymakers attribute differences in achievement to factors within schools, others focus on factors outside of schools. On the one hand, some of the in-school factors that affect achievement

include unqualified teachers, unequal funding, high turnover of teachers and principals, low expectations and a dumbed-down curriculum. On the other hand, much of the achievement gap is due to factors outside of schools, including inadequate housing, poor healthcare, and environmental stresses. Nevertheless, despite the overwhelming number of urban schools that are struggling to educate their students, it is important to note that there are numerous examples of highly successful urban schools that beat the odds.

Currently there is a contentious debate about how to improve urban schools. Some reformers advocate a take-no-excuses approach that focuses on issues within schools and contend that poverty is not the primary reason for low educational achievement. They support systemic reforms through the growth of charter schools and/or school voucher programs and through standards-based student and teacher accountability systems. In addition, they focus attention on ensuring that all students have quality teachers and administrators through the recruitment of high-performing candidates, new tenure laws, and the use of value-added accountability programs. Others argue that school-based reforms by themselves are limited in their ability to reduce the achievement gaps unless they also address the factors outside of schools that contribute to educational inequalities.

We are at a crucial moment in educational reform, particularly in urban districts. This is also true internationally, with countries such as the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, Japan, and Finland grappling with these problems. There is a growing divide between those who support the no-excuses approach to education reform and those who argue that societies must concurrently address poverty and the many forms of discrimination that affect educational achievement and the life outcomes of children in urban schools.

Social science and historical research have played, and must continue to play, an important role in understanding urban educational problems and evaluating policies aimed at solving them. The goal of *Palgrave Studies in Urban Education* is to publish books that use social science and historical knowledge to analyze urban educational processes, practices, and policies from a variety of research methods and theoretical perspectives. The books in this series examine a diverse set of urban educational issues and offer compelling insights into the limits and possibilities of urban educational reforms. Moreover, the series strives to contribute to the development of best practices that improve the life chances of the increasing number of children who pass through urban schools.

Molly Makris's *Public Housing and School Choice in a Gentrified City: Youth Experiences of Uneven Opportunity* provides an important analysis of the effects of gentrification on the lives of children in a gentrified city. She

examines its effects both on children living in a public housing development as well as on children of the more affluent families. Most importantly she shows how and why school choice, including entrance into charter schools, has prevented public schools from becoming socioeconomically integrated. Her analysis also includes the connection between school choice, universal preschool, and real-estate development resulting in what she calls prolonged gentrification. Using an impressive array of qualitative methods, she provides a compelling and nuanced analysis of neoliberalism, gentrification, schooling, and uneven opportunity, which makes an excellent addition to *Palgrave Studies in Urban Education*.

Alan R. Sadovnik
Susan F. Semel
Series Editors

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Acknowledgments

First and foremost, I thank the participants who willingly gave their time, even opened their homes to me, and shared their experiences and opinions on what can be a very personal subject. It is my hope that in some way the children and the community of Hoboken will benefit from this research.

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At the Center where I conducted some of this research, one young boy would ask me, "How's the book?" It is my sincere hope that he and his peers will be afforded the educational background, resources, and opportunities to write dissertations or books someday, or to do whatever it is that they dream of doing.

Chapter One
A City Divided?

> Tonight I attended a softball game at Mama Johnson Field (part of the main public housing campus in Hoboken). It is a beautiful night, and the back-to-back games are played under the lights. By 9:00 p.m. there are at least 50 young professionals in the bleachers and on the field. Many are spread onto the sidewalk to practice pitching and catching as they await their games or act as informal cheerleaders for other games. The teams wear matching T-shirts named for popular bars in Hoboken. The Green Rock Tap & Grill team, in their matching T-shirts and black and green striped socks, look like the stunning cast of a primetime drama. Of the eight co-ed teams I observe today, all the players save one are white or Asian. After the games, the teams go out for reduced priced drinks at their sponsoring taverns. During the game, the black and Latino residents of the 21 brick public housing buildings, which hover above and surround the field, hang out nearby. Children ride their bikes past, and some residents stop by the outside of the fence to observe or talk to the umpire. Nearby, a number of young black men play basketball on the basketball courts (Field Notes, June 2011).
>
> At the meeting, the executive director of the Hoboken Housing Authority says that adult sports leagues using Mama Johnson Field now generate $30,000 annually to self-fund resident services in public housing… He bought I9 and Zog Sports [organized adult sports leagues] into Hoboken (Field Notes, May 2011).
>
> The [redevelopment of Mama Johnson Field] baseball field, that's good. They're doing that; I don't want to say 100% for the kids of the projects, 50%. The other 50% is for them [yuppies], so they can have somewhere to play because I'm pretty sure they didn't like the way it was looking or how it was going when they were playing kickball down here. (Participant in focus group with public housing residents, October 2012)

Hoboken, New Jersey, is a gentrified city. It was once a thriving working-class immigrant community. Then, like so many American cities, it experienced a period of economic decline before becoming popular with gentrifiers. Today, Hoboken is no longer a gentrifying city; it is gentrified.

The Hudson River waterfront, with its views of Manhattan, is lined with upscale and luxury apartment buildings, restaurants, and a W Hotel. The southwest corner of Hoboken, one of the last areas to gentrify, now has its share of $750,000 condominiums as well. Yet, in many ways, this is a city divided. As these excerpts suggest, the relationship between gentrification and low-income public housing in Hoboken is complicated. While renting out the ball field to softball and kickball leagues brings middle-class residents into the public housing neighborhood, earns money for resident services (which the government no longer funds as the social safety net is continually cut), and leads to upkeep of the field, it also creates periods of time when the ball field is no longer available for residents, and young people from the housing authority are relegated to outsider spectator status. Hoboken presents an interesting case for studying the various ways that residing in a gentrified community affects youth in public housing and how outside forces, which I refer to as *neoliberal nonegalitarianism*,[1] are influencing the lives of low-income youth through education and housing policy.

Despite the focus of this book, Hoboken is not comprised entirely of advantaged professionals and black or Latino low-income public housing residents. Due to limitations of space and focus, this book deals largely with these two groups because they are relatively easy to define[2] for purposes of analysis. Yet the reality is far less "black and white." There are working-class families in Hoboken, immigrant families, Latino and black families of means, white low-income families, and people who do not define themselves in any of these ways. Because Hoboken is now a wealthy community (the median home value of owner-occupied units is $567,700, and the median family income is $104,789), the remaining working-class residents are largely those who have been in Hoboken for generations and own property in the community. Working-class people interested in living in Hoboken today would find the real estate out of reach financially. The dwindling, largely Italian, working-class population that remains in Hoboken struggles with feelings of powerlessness in the face of changing dynamics. Public housing residents and white Hoboken "old timers" have formed an unlikely political alliance in opposition to the influx of white advantaged residents.

Deep-seated resentment and political power struggles between factions of the community have risen to the surface with a plan to tear down and rebuild the public housing campus in Hoboken. This was evident in August 2013 when the executive director of the Hoboken Housing Authority (HHA), a Puerto Rican man who grew up in the HHA, sued Mayor Dawn Zimmer, an advantaged Jewish woman, for ethnic cleansing. "Soon after moving to Hoboken, Mayor Zimmer and Grossbard [Zimmer's

husband] embarked on an ambitious political quest to transform Hoboken politically and ethnically consistent with their own political, cultural, and ethnic derivation" (Zayas, 2013, para. 7).

These tensions resulting from life in a gentrified community are in the background, and sometimes the foreground, of this book. But this is really a story of the young people who live in public housing in Hoboken and their environmental and educational experiences as part of a racial and socioeconomic minority growing up in an upper-middle-class mile-square city. Public housing residents have not been priced out because of the subsidized nature of their homes, and they are largely in the racial and socioeconomic minority. Meanwhile, they live within blocks of wealthy professionals, many of whom think nothing of paying $5,000 a month in rent or more than $1 million to buy a home. These "yuppies" or "gentry" or "advantaged"[3] people can send their dogs to swimming lessons and summer camp on a farm and stop at the gourmet food truck to purchase organic gluten-free dog snacks while their infants attend day care centers with flutists performing at naptime. With the reurbanization of cities, an increasing number of advantaged people are choosing to live in cities such as Hoboken and stay to raise children there, although many do still relocate to the suburbs before their children reach elementary or middle school. In this book, I explore how local policy issues influence the daily lives of young people from low-income backgrounds and how they are affected by larger outside forces. While the specifics of Hoboken are distinct, the local dilemmas have relevance elsewhere.

Not Just a Hoboken Story

The inequality stemming from gentrification that is evident in Hoboken is certainly not unique to this city. Mayor DeBlasio has made inequality in New York City (NYC) a linchpin of his administration. His reference to the idea of two New Yorks, or a divided city, is similar to the situation across the Hudson River in Hoboken. In *Great American City* (2012), Sampson wrote of the long history of issues of segregation and inequality in Chicago. Problems related to school choice and public housing residents are prevalent in other cities, such as Atlanta and Memphis.

There is a historical trend in sociology of the examination of inequality and concentration of poverty. From Park and Burgess (1924) to Wilson (1987), Massey and Denton (1993), and Sampson (2012), scholars have grappled with the causes and consequences of inequality. While the findings reported in this book are about Hoboken, they may have relevance in other cities. Hoboken's narrative makes for an interesting case because the community is a mile squared, the public school system is small, it was an

Abbott District,[4] it has universal preschool, and there are extremes of wealth and poverty, all within eyesight of Manhattan. Although the divided city is a reality in Hoboken, it is less divided than one might expect. The sharing of common spaces and places has important implications for community development, education, and housing policy that are explored in this book within the larger context of urban America.

Public Housing in a Gentrified City

The struggles that low-income public housing residents and their children face are well documented. These can include a lack of educational opportunities, poor health, and physical and social isolation. This book examines whether the struggles that youth living in public housing normally experience are alleviated and identifies opportunities that may be created when the neighborhood surrounding public housing is gentrified rather than highly disadvantaged. The literature is replete with studies of gentrification, but less is known about what happens to low-income residents in an already gentrified neighborhood, particularly those who live in public housing complexes. It is well documented that low- and moderate-income residents are frequently displaced by gentrification (Anderson, 1990; Davila, 2004; Glass, 1964; Lloyd, 2006; Mele, 1996). An increasing number of gentrifiers are remaining in cities longer with children, becoming *parent gentrifiers* or *family gentrifiers* (DeSena, 2009; Hankins, 2007; Karsten, 2003; Roberts, 2011). Yet, in many neighborhoods where gentrification has occurred, a sizable population of low-income residents remains in public housing complexes (Freeman, 2006; Hyra, 2008; Small, 2004). This population has been given little voice in the literature. The political struggles surrounding gentrification have been thoroughly researched (Abu-Lughod, 1994; Smith, 1996), but there is far less research about the lived experiences of low-income residents in gentrified neighborhoods (for exceptions, see Freeman, 2006; Small, 2004). Some case studies of gentrification have examined its effects on neighborhood old-timers (Anderson, 1990; Chernoff, 1980; Freeman, 2006; Levy & Cybriwsky, 2010) or on public housing residents (Small, 2004). This book, unlike others, examines the educational and environmental possibilities and problems affecting *youth* in *public housing* who live in an *already* gentrified neighborhood.

The failure of many large-scale, high-rise public housing projects has been well documented (Kotlowitz, 1991; Venkatesh, 2000; Von Hoffman, 1996). In the last few decades high- and low-rise public housing has been razed across the country. In some cities, these towers, homes to families for decades, were destroyed in public ceremonies of celebration with great fanfare. If, and when, these housing units are replaced after demolition, it is usually

by mixed-income development. Recent government public housing policies are based on the belief that mixed-income neighborhoods are superior to the isolation that occurred in low-income minority disadvantaged neighborhoods in the second half of the twentieth century (Goetz, 2011; Schwartz & Tajbakhsh, 1997). These policies have led to aggressive demolition of traditional public housing complexes in Newark, Jersey City, Baltimore, New Orleans, St. Louis, Atlanta, and Chicago (Goetz, 2011; Von Hoffman, 1996). These strategies stem from the belief that concentrated poverty should be alleviated (Smith, 2000) because of its negative effects on residents.

Not coincidentally, as gentrification accelerated in the 1970s and middle-class Americans experienced renewed interest in living in the city, these government policies such as scattered site housing, high-rise project demolition, mixed-income housing, Housing Opportunities for People Everywhere (HOPE VI), and Section 8 which were intended to deconcentrate poor minorities and increase available space in urban centers accelerated. The federal government adopted the new approach for housing low-income families—poverty deconcentration (Crump, 2002; Goetz, 2003)—at a time of accelerated gentrification under the guise of decreasing the concentration of poverty.

Although this deconcentration of poverty through demolition of federal housing has not (yet) occurred in Hoboken and there is still some degree of concentration, low-income residents in gentrified neighborhoods should theoretically benefit from deconcentration of poverty and the mixing of incomes within the city created through gentrification. The well-known Moving to Opportunity (MTO) program moved families from impoverished urban neighborhoods to neighborhoods with less poverty in an attempt to improve outcomes for the poor (Sanbonmatsu et al., 2007). In Hoboken, public housing residents do not have to be moved to opportunity; instead, opportunity has moved to them. The public housing campus, made up of traditional low- and high-rise public housing, is adjacent, in some areas on three sides, to recently built developments offering "luxury apartments" and three-bedroom condos in the $750,000 to $1 million range. As one participant from the housing authority explained, "I feel like it's all together because you wouldn't have a person that lives in Uptown walk through the projects. They would be so scared. Now, I be like, 'Oh, my God,' you see these rich people walking through. It's calmer."

Residents of Hoboken's traditional low- and high-rise public housing projects have not been displaced by gentrification and can potentially benefit from the demographics of the community and the amenities brought by gentrification. No studies to date have analyzed how gentrification influences school-age residents of public housing whose families, unlike residents of market-rate housing, do not live in fear of losing their homes

and can remain and possibly reap advantages. Many communities where public housing is located have gentrified or are presently undergoing gentrification (Freeman, 2006; Hyra, 2008; Small, 2004). Researchers and policy analysts might find the implications of this research to be applicable to other communities.

The public housing landscape in Hoboken could change, the HHA currently has a plan entitled "Vision 20/20: A Sustainable Plan for Public Housing in Hoboken, N.J." (Vision 20/20; HHA & Marchetto Higgins Stieve PC, 2010). This plan details proposed changes to the main public housing campus in Hoboken, including "change the image of public housing; create a secure, healthy neighborhood; increase access to shops, healthy food and jobs; integrate the HHA campus with the City of Hoboken; and create a mixed-income sustainable community with housing choices" (p. 14). The plan is to demolish current public housing to make way for a new US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) mixed-income community that follows the planning principles of new urbanism, traditional neighborhood development, and transit-oriented development. This type of plan is necessary, in part, because funding for public housing now supports demolition and redevelopment, private-public partnerships, and mixed-income housing, not the rejuvenation of traditional housing.

This book argues that neoliberal policies that support the privatization of the social safety net including public housing and public schools threaten the current delicate balance in diverse urban communities. In Hoboken, as this research demonstrates public housing residents benefit from access to both the economic and social opportunities that they would not have in a low-income segregated community. However, if public housing is undermined, so is the possibility for a socially balanced community.

Many of the goals of this housing plan are already being met in Hoboken; as a result of gentrification, traditional low- and high-rise public housing coexist successfully in an upper-middle-class community. Public housing residents enjoy access to coffee shops, parks, transit, and cultural activities alongside advantaged residents. While this plan has the potential to improve housing conditions in the HHA and create a more integrated streetscape and city, if public housing is demolished, there is the risk of displacement of low-income residents (particularly those most at risk), as has happened in other communities that have made this drastic change (Buron et al., 2002; Goetz, 2003; Marquis & Ghosh, 2008; National Housing Law Project, 2002; Vale, 2013). In addition, the City of Hoboken, which already teeters on the edge of being an exclusive upper-income community, would lose much of its diversity, which this research demonstrates is something that even the most wealthy Hoboken residents claim to value.

While these reforms would surely influence neighborhood demographics, they would not improve educational issues.

Education in a Gentrified City

In addition to its examination of gentrification and housing policy, this book examines current neoliberal educational policy. Neoliberal educational policies that promote school choice are gaining popularity. Across the country, and in New Jersey in particular, charter schools are proliferating. Yet, research into the effects of charter schools in gentrified communities is limited (see André-Bechely, 2005; Hankins, 2007). This book is the only empirical study of the education of youth in public housing in a gentrified community. This examination is also unusual in that charter schools in Hoboken are boutique charter schools serving an advantaged majority white population, unlike many other urban charter schools.

It is well established that one of the major problems in American education today is the academic achievement gap (Delpit, 2012; Ferguson, 2008; Sadovnik, 2007; Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 2004), or the measured difference in academic performance between urban and suburban students, African American/Latino students and white/Asian students, and students from different socioeconomic backgrounds. In order to understand the causes of the achievement gap and to identify ways to decrease it, one must explore factors *outside* of the school. Urban children face myriad problems outside of school that influence their performance in school (Anyon, 2005; Berliner, 2007; Kozol, 2005). Academic successes and failures are embodiments of students' material and social world. As Anyon (1997, p. 168) explained in *Ghetto Schooling*, "Attempting to fix inner city schools without fixing the city in which they are embedded is like trying to clean the air on one side of a screen door."

This book examines the environmental and sociocultural factors outside of school that influence school-age children; it also takes a critical look at the Hoboken school system and how gentrification and neoliberal school choice policies have influenced it. Socioeconomic and, with it, racial desegregation in schools should be the goal. Low-income students have more success in *middle-class schools* where the numerical majority of students are middle class (Kahlenberg, 2001, 2006). In theory, gentrification in Hoboken should allow low-income children to attend middle-class schools. This book examines the extent to which this is happening and, if not, why not. It also analyzes how families in public housing utilize school choice, the efforts being made to recruit them into charter schools, and the overall influence of charter schools on education in Hoboken.

This is a contribution to existing research; other studies of gentrification and education have explored the perspective of the advantaged or have focused heavily on school decisions by advantaged residents (Butler, 2003; Butler & Lees, 2006; Cucchiara, 2013; DeSena & Ansalone, 2009; Morrison, 2011; Posey-Maddox, 2014; Roberts, 2011; Roda, 2013; Stillman, 2011). Other research has established that while advantaged residents claim to value diversity (Roberts, 2011), charter schools and school choice often lead to greater segregation (André-Bechely, 2005; Brantlinger, 2003; Lacireno-Paquet et al., 2002; Lubienski et al., 2009; Sohoni & Saporito, 2009). This research establishes empirically how the choices of advantaged residents influence public housing residents and why parents in public housing make the educational choices that they make.

Theories

Throughout this book, I use theories of gentrification, neoliberal nonegalitarianism, social and cultural capital, and political economy of place to understand the experiences of low-income public housing residents in Hoboken.

Gentrification

In 1987 Zukin defined gentrification as "the conversion of socially marginal and working-class areas of the central city to middle class residential use" (p. 129). In 2004 Perez expanded the definition of gentrification as "an economic and social process whereby private capital (real estate firms, developers) and individual homeowners and renters reinvest in fiscally neglected neighborhoods through housing rehabilitation, loft conversions, and the construction of new housing stock" (p. 139). These definitions demonstrate the shifting understanding and dynamics of gentrification.

Although gentrification as it is known today is a relatively recent phenomenon, beginning in the 1960s, similar processes have occurred throughout history (Smith, 1996). As early as the 1940s and 1950s, some precursors to modern-day gentrification appeared in US neighborhoods such as Georgetown in Washington, DC, and Beacon Hill in Boston. Ruth Glass coined the term *gentrification* in her seminal work *London, Aspects of Change* in 1964. This book engendered discussions and debates over gentrification that have lasted almost 50 years.

After World War II, disinvestment and demographic and socioeconomic changes made many American cities ripe for gentrification. Sociocultural and political-economic forces left urban areas with low-cost real estate and vacant, deteriorated properties that were accessible to gentrifiers. Over time,

cultural shifts in American society, such as increasing numbers of dual-income couples, couples choosing to have fewer children or to have children later, changing ideas of domestic aesthetics, and the youth rebellions of the 1960s and 1970s generated an increased interest in urban living, with more people willing to move into areas that were considered low-income, diverse, dilapidated, or dangerous (Ley, 2010). In addition, neoliberal government and economic policies promoted free-market policies.

The classic story of gentrification as told by Anderson (1990) in *Streetwise* is one of "yuppies": well-to-do, usually white, usually childless, 22- to 35-year-old professionals who move into an area of the city perceived by advantaged people as "undiscovered." They renovate old affordable homes and in the process gentrify the neighborhood. A larger number of middle- and upper-income whites in the neighborhood increases the value of the space and results in better city services and higher property values and taxes. Because of increasing prices, the poor residents, usually not home owners, are forced to move.

Zukin's influential 1982 study of Manhattan lofts introduced the concept of art culture as an engine of change in American cities. She showed how artists, together with city politicians in need of economic growth and development, came together to remake SoHo. Gentrification in SoHo became a precursor to, and model for, gentrification in many other communities. Lloyd (2006) described how the movement of artists into Wicker Park in Chicago began the process of gentrification. In other neighborhoods, local culture has been used to spur gentrification. Davila (2004) examined gentrification and Latinization in East Harlem in Manhattan. Neoliberal policies and reforms excluded longtime residents of the neighborhood, and culture was used as a commodity to increase gentrification, which could lead to the displacement of the very Latino residents upon whose culture it is based. Just as they packaged the "Latin" in East Harlem, they packaged the "rawness" of Alphabet City in Manhattan and provided opportunities for people to consume "the glamour of poverty" (Mele, 1996, p. 236). The prodevelopment policies of city government furthered gentrification and manipulation of rent control laws to allow for the displacement of longtime residents.

While it is accurate that gentrification is often spurred by advantaged artists moving to a community, the popular narrative that promotes this as art and artists *coming* to a community or urban *pioneers* moving into undiscovered territory promotes a cultural deficit narrative that undermines the very idea that there were residents present prior to gentrification, as well as artists. It encourages the idea that a community has not come into being until it is populated by advantaged (white) residents. It undermines the cultural assets possessed by a community *prior* to gentrification and depicts natives of the community as in need of "discovering" (Smith, 1996). This

popular gentrification narrative also paints a more grassroots story than the reality in which these early gentrifiers are backed by neoliberal government policies that make gentrification and, with it, displacement possible.

There are many critics of gentrification. Zukin (2010, p. 1) began *Naked City* by writing, "In the early years of the twenty-first century, New York City lost its soul." She said that these places have become popular because people move there seeking a certain kind of authenticity but that their very presence in these communities leads to the end of authenticity. First, local businesses close; eventually, the death knell of authenticity—a Starbucks®—arrives. She described how the "hipperati" or "bourgeois bohemians" move in, followed by rising prices, and eventually the initial gentrifiers sell their homes to even wealthier citizens. She called this process *re-urbanization*.

Depictions such as Anderson's and Zukin's of how this process occurs may not account for all the facets of gentrification. Other scholars have challenged the way gentrification is frequently depicted. Smith (1979) asserted that the true driver of gentrification is not a quest for a more urban existence by young childless pioneers, but instead a market that is open to profitable redevelopment. Logan and Molotch (1987) utilized the political economy paradigm. They argued that those with power (real estate speculators, newspaper editors, insurance companies, utility companies, universities, and politicians) determine neighborhood advantage and disadvantage. Thus, large economic structures, special interests, and politics influence neighborhood change and property values.

When capital shifts, the housing and real estate market shifts to meet its needs. Sassen (1990, 1991) examined the impact of economic restructuring, maintaining that the dominant individuals, particularly in cities, are those who work in FIRE (financial, insurance, and real estate) industries. These globalized industries generate wealth, and those with high-end service-sector jobs are dependent on cheap labor from people in low-end service-sector jobs. The result is a large gap between the top and bottom of the economy, with very little growth in the middle. These disparities between the very wealthy and those whom they employ have made gentrification a key element of global cities.

Globalization—the interactions among and flow of capital between countries—has also scaled up gentrification. In her study of Brooklyn Heights, Lees (2003) used the term *super-gentrification* to describe what happens after gentrification. This, like Zukin's reurbanization, occurs when the wealthy gentrifiers sell their homes to the super-rich. This intensified regentrification, or gentrification superimposed on gentrification, is a result of global cities and wealthy financiers who have large amounts of money to spend. This process pushes out the initial gentrifiers. The super-gentrifiers, unlike traditional gentrifiers, do not feel a particular connection to the

community or passion for diversity. They have much more money, work long hours in the financial services, and do not send their children to public primary or secondary schools (Butler & Lees, 2006).

Gentrification is part of the neoliberal move away from the public (public housing, public education, and public space) to the private. According to Hackworth (2007, p. 149), "Gentrification is the knife-edged neighborhood-based manifestation of neo-liberalism." As a result of neoliberalism, large corporations now have power over real estate, a phenomenon he called corporatized gentrification. With increasing frequency, he argues corporate firms enter gentrification at the beginning rather than the end stages (Hackworth, 2007). Smith (1996) argued that the government, corporations, and the market work against the interests of low-income people of color.

In Hoboken, gentrification had many of these elements. Newcomer artists moving into Hoboken signaled the beginning of gentrification. Middle-class people moved to Hoboken, restoring homes backed by policies and developers who were interested in gentrification and profit. Many Hoboken residents who could no longer afford the city changing around them were displaced. Advantaged residents who move to gentrified Hoboken today do not see this move as a risk or as an investment for the future; no one would label them "urban pioneers." They are members of Florida's (2003) creative class moving into a predominantly white, middle- to upper-middle-class city with an abundance of amenities that they desire. Like the super-gentrifiers, they are not moving to Hoboken to seek a diverse experience; they are likely to socialize with those from similar socioeconomic backgrounds.

While displacement resulting from gentrification can never be a positive, gentrification brings other changes to a community for low-income residents who remain. These changes are examined in this book.

Neoliberal Nonegalitarianism

Gentrification, public housing, and education policy are influenced by *neoliberalism*, a term first used in interwar Germany by Rüstow and Eucken in the 1930s (Seiler, 2009) and more frequently beginning in the 1970s. It is important that this term not be confused with "new liberalism" of Democrats. The "neo" refers to the fact that it was a new way of approaching the classic liberal economics of Adam Smith. This revival of liberal economics now includes a push for free markets, decreases in public social services, deregulation, and privatization in a now-globalized world (Martinez & Garcia, n.d.).

> The international term "neoliberalism," which stems from the classical meaning of "liberal" and refers to contemporary free-market reformers often

> is misinterpreted in this country to be the equivalent of a "New Democrat." While many so-called New Democrats are neoliberal and subscribe to the ideology that deregulated competition between non-government service providers will cure all social ills, the term better describes more right-wing pundits who argue for extreme shifts toward total deregulation and free-market reform. (Wells, 2002, pp. 24–25)

Over the past 30 years, the state has become less involved in areas of social welfare but increasingly interventionist on the side of wealth accumulation (Lipman, 2011). This has been evident in the support and incentivizing of the reurbanization of cities by middle-class Americans and corporate development. In the 1990s, this neoliberal form of governing began in earnest (Lipman, 2011). This changing role of urban governance is evident in privatization, from housing to infrastructure to public space to education.

The role of the state in neoliberalism is to promote the free market and growth of economic capital (Lipman, 2011), and this is evident in gentrification. For example, neighborhoods inhabited by people of color are frequently deemed *blighted* and cleared for redevelopment. As a result, communities inhabited by people of color are seen in the collective conscience, and portayed by the media, as the "Wild West," ripe for urban pioneering by white gentrifiers. Crump (2002, p. 593) argued that to pave the way for profitable, mixed-income urban housing development, "minority residents of public housing projects have been systematically demonized." As Goetz (2011) showed, demolition of public housing in the 1990s was related to gentrification and neoliberalism. "Where market rents are significantly higher than public housing rents, more demolition occurs. This suggests that market pressures to redevelop are an important determinant of the aggressiveness of local housing authorities in pursuing demolition and removal" (p. 280). Goetz found that, in locations where there is a discrepancy between the racial background of residents and the rest of the population, there is a larger effort to raze public housing. Federal auditors found that HOPE VI was utilized in places "most amenable to higher income redevelopment rather than the most severely distressed" areas in the 1990s (National Housing Law Project, 2002, p. ii).

As the creative class reurbanizes cities, the government backs progentrification free-market policies that have displaced working-class and poor residents and demolished public housing in many urban locales, leaving cities at the mercy of corporations and the advantaged (Wyly & Hammal, 2000). These same forces promote a neoliberal school choice agenda. These neoliberal policies are justified as assistance to the poor, but they benefit the advantaged exponentially more than the poor and disproportionately harm low-income people of color.

This neoliberal agenda and the phenomenon that I call neoliberal nonegalitarianism—a belief in the free market without a focus on creating economic, social, and political equality—is a lens through which I examine the experiences of low-income youth in Hoboken. The chapters that follow deal largely with two aspects of life in Hoboken: public housing and public education. Both of these institutions are currently affected by neoliberalism in the form of restructuring and privatization, which influences the uneven life experiences of youth in Hoboken. Historically in American cities, public housing and public education were seen as part and parcel of the American Dream. Public housing provided families, often white immigrant families, assistance on their path to the middle class. Public education has long been seen as the great equalizer. Yet over the past half century, as the demographics of urban public housing shifted and urban public education expanded whom it served, financial and political support for these institutions also shifted. This decrease in financial and political support has coincided with a lack of unskilled employment opportunities that previously created pathways to the middle class, as well as renewed interest in real estate occupied by low-income residents in urban areas. Within this context, market-based neoliberal reforms, which push privatization of schools and housing, have shifted power over the lives of young people of color in public housing in Hoboken from a governmental safety net into the hands of the market and the advantaged class that control and benefit from this market.

To reform public housing in Hoboken, mixed-income development and private-public partnerships are proposed. The proposed Vision 20/20 Plan calls for demolition of traditional high- and low-rise public housing on the public housing campus in Hoboken. This plan to tear down current housing is representative of the financial disinvestment in traditional public housing that is happening in cities such as Chicago, Baltimore, Atlanta, and Newark.

Meanwhile, the district schools in Hoboken are perceived as inadequate for many in the middle class, and to fill this gap popular charter schools in town were founded by middle-class advantaged parents. Politicians and developers have supported the growth of charter schools, which do not employ unionized teachers, compete for advantaged students with district schools, and have served to keep advantaged families in urban areas longer, which prolongs gentrification (chapter 8).

While this particular scenario may be distinctive to Hoboken (although there are similar situations in nearby Jersey City and in neighborhoods in other cities such as New York City and Atlanta), the movement toward privately managed charter schools is part of the larger market-based neoliberal reform movement (Ravitch, 2013). The grassroots charter schools

in Hoboken are different from the charter school conversation nationwide, yet many of the heralded charter schools nationwide are controlled by charter management organizations that are funded and supported by high-powered advantaged people. Thus, charter schools as a group give power to the advantaged and contribute to the larger neoliberal education movement. This larger corporate reform movement has expanded charter schools and online learning nationwide, pushed for increased testing and accountability measures, weakened teacher tenure, and created alternate routes into teaching. All of this is turning public education into a private entrepreneurial force while undermining the core American value of public neighborhood schools (Ravitch, 2013). This book examines the experiences of neoliberal nonegalitarianism for those children not born into advantage.

Neoliberal School Choice Policy

This neoliberal shift from public to private is evident in the education sector. There has always been choice in education; parents with economic capital can purchase the kind of education they desire for their children through religious schools, private schools, and home schooling. Families with economic capital have also exercised choice in selecting to live in districts with successful school systems. Magnet schools, open enrollment policies, and choice districts expanded school choice further. In recent years, neoliberal politicians have supported the idea that if students from families with means have the opportunity to opt out of their local public school, then students from families without means should have the same opportunity. This neoliberal school choice theory is based on free-market principles and the idea that all schools will become more successful when they experience enhanced competition. As Wells (2002, p. 6) explained, "Proponents of this view argue that the best way to improve public education is to force schools to compete for 'customers' by providing parents greater choices of where their children attend school." Recently, school choice has led to the rapid expansion of charter schools.

Historically, school choice has not been associated with equality for low-income children of color. In fact, in the South after desegregation, some school districts implemented "freedom of choice" policies precisely to maintain segregated schools (Ravitch, 2010). Then, after the federal government strictly enforced desegregation, many southern states embraced "schools of choice," which were segregated private schools. In Virginia, the government even gave tuition grants for students to attend private schools (Ravitch, 2010).

The idea of charter schools began in 1988 with Budde (1988), who proposed teacher-run, teacher-empowering schools. These schools, he argued, should use cutting-edge pedagogical techniques to meet specific goals. In

1988, Al Shanker had a similar idea of creating teacher-led charter schools to reach students who struggled in traditional public schools (Ravitch, 2010).

Charter schools were less controversial than vouchers and garnered more political support. In 1991, Minnesota was the first state to enact a charter school law, and the first charter school, City Academy High School, opened in St. Paul in 1992 (Bulkley & Wohlstetter, 2003). Beginning in the early 1990s and continuing until the present, charter schools have gained in popularity (Ravitch, 2010). The Clinton administration awarded federal dollars to encourage growth of charter schools. In 2012, there were more than 5,600 charter schools in 41 US states, serving close to 2 million students (McMullen, 2012).

Charter schools are based on the concept of choice. Students are not assigned to a charter school; rather, parents choose to send their child to a particular charter school. In Hoboken, when a charter school has more applicants than openings, a lottery is conducted. Charter school laws differ by state, including various levels of accountability, but the schools usually have autonomy over budget, personnel, and curriculum. They are outside the purview of the school board and generally do not follow union contracts. They are public schools and thus tuition free. Charter contracts generally last three–five years; if the school is not successful, the charter can be canceled at the end of the contract (Bulkley & Wohlstetter, 2003).

Charter schools are heavily concentrated in low-income, high-minority, urban areas. In New Jersey, 54.1 percent of public school students are white, yet in charter-hosting districts only 19 percent of students are white. Charter-hosting districts also have twice the state average of students who are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. In nearby New York City, charter schools serve 77 percent free/reduced-price lunch students, 60 percent African American students, and 33 percent Latino students (New York City Charter School Center, 2013). Yet charter schools, particularly those centered on a theme such as a second language, are now beginning to expand into higher-income suburban communities, as well (Mooney, 2011).

Proponents of charter schools argue that the schools create increased choice for at-risk populations and have the potential to close the achievement gap (Brooks, 2009; Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 2004). Yet, many studies have shown that charter schools do not serve the most at-risk student population (Wells, 2002). Critics argue that charter schools "cream" students from the public school system. When Kozol visited KIPP (Knowledge Is Power Program) Academy in the South Bronx, he observed that, although it looked good, the children appear to be far better dressed (with Lands End backpacks and quality prescription glasses) than any South Bronx student population he had ever experienced (Sgobbo, 2010). Ravitch (2010) admitted that some charter schools are producing

excellent results. However, she warned that these schools are taking the most-motivated students and students with the most-involved parents out of the traditional public schools, which could create "a two-tier system of widening inequality" (p. 145). Yet, some point out that charter schools hold great potential and can encourage renewed community involvement in education, as well as new opportunities for progressive education in the public school context, and therefore should not be discounted (Rofes & Stulberg, 2004).

Debates among residents over neoliberal school choice and charter schools are fierce in Hoboken, where there are three charter schools that serve majority white and Asian, higher-income children. In addition to charter schools, neoliberal school choice exists within the district-run public schools that are more likely to enroll the children from public housing. With intra-district school choice, parents can choose from the three elementary schools in the community. These policies influence the demographics of the schools but also have implications for relationships within the community.

Neoliberal Public Housing Policy

Support for public housing has waned since the 1970s. In the 1990s, public housing policy was heavily influenced by neoliberalism. Like education policy in the 1990s, public housing policy fell victim to the draw of private-public partnerships and the lure of the free market. Congress, in 1996, began to require viability tests for housing projects with over 300 units and 10 percent vacancies; those that were deemed more expensive to rehabilitate than to raze were considered "nonviable" (Vale, 2013). So began the demolition of much of the public housing in America's urban areas.

HUD's HOPE VI program began in 1992 in an attempt to revitalize public housing throughout the United States. This mixed-income program stemmed from the National Commission on Severely Distressed Public Housing, which, according to HUD, "was charged with proposing a National Action Plan to eradicate severely distressed public housing" (US HUD, n.d., para. 1). This eradication was undertaken through rehabilitating some developments and demolishing and replacing others. New housing was created to be mixed-income in design. More than $6 billion in grants have been awarded for HOPE VI (US HUD, n.d.).

Today's mixed-income public housing construction looks very different from the traditional public housing of the past. Gone are the towering high rises surrounded by open space. Modern public housing is inspired by Newman's (1972) theories of defensible space and the ideas of New Urbanism. These row houses or townhouses generally face the street and

have private yards and distinct fronts and backs (Franck & Mostoller, 1995). HUD's newest initiative, Choice Neighborhoods, is purported to be based on the success of HOPE VI and is designed to "transform distressed neighborhoods and public and assisted projects into viable and sustainable mixed-income neighborhoods" (US HUD, n.d., para. 1).

Although large-scale public housing projects now have a negative reputation and public housing policy has steered clear of them, some argue that this reputation is unfair. "The public housing program's reputation is greatly undeserved. Apart from a comparatively small number of visible and dramatic failures, public housing is a vital national resource that provides decent and affordable homes to over a million families across the country" (National Housing Law Project, 2002, para 2).

Across the river from Hoboken, the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA), like the HHA, has maintained traditional public housing stock. Concerns over neoliberal housing policy were brought to light in 2013 when NYCHA began to push to lease open land on its projects for revenue to support public housing. This open land would include courtyards, playgrounds, parking lots, and parks in public housing in Manhattan, and NYCHA hopes that this would raise more than $50 million a year. While NYCHA argues that this is better than what other cities have done in letting housing deteriorate or demolishing it, residents have major concerns about cost of living increases in the area, loss of green space, and the ever-present fear that this is a slippery slope that could eventually lead to loss of their homes (Navarro, 2013).

These initiatives in public housing that favor the private sector over the public sector are representative of neoliberal policies shaping cities today. In Hoboken, traditional public housing stands, but financial support for this type of housing is lacking and the Vision 20/20 plan is being debated that would demolish the main campus and build a mixed-income development in its stead.

Capital

In addition to neoliberalism, capital is a lens that can be used to examine the educational and environmental experiences of youth in public housing in a gentrified community. *Economic capital* refers to financial resources and underlies this study of a socioeconomic minority of low-income public housing residents living in a wealthy gentrified community. Economic capital influences the education and environment of all Americans, with low-income urban minorities frequently facing segregated neighborhoods, segregated schools, and a subpar education system (Anyon, 1997; Kozol, 2005; Massey & Denton, 1993; Wacquant, 2008; Wilson, 1997).

However, when analyzing the experiences of low-income children in a gentrified community, two other types of capital are important theoretical concepts: social capital and cultural capital. These two concepts, as well as the political economy of place and neoliberal nonegalitarianism, can be used to understand the potential benefits and problems associated with children from public housing growing up in Hoboken.

Social Capital

In social science, the term *social capital* generally refers to people's social networks, contacts, and relationships. Like economic capital, social capital yields benefits to those who possess it. As Putnam (2000, p. 19) defined it, "Social capital refers to connections among individuals—social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them." Social capital can mean having connections in a community that lead to employment opportunities or beneficial personal relationships. It can also include understanding the values or expected social norms of a group; role models; the collective efficacy or social control created through group ties; or the trust established through close connections. This intangible social capital can lead to tangible economic capital for those who harness it.

The education sociologist Coleman solidified social capital's place in educational theory with "Social Capital in the Creation of Human Capital." in 1988. In it he examined how both a family's social capital and a community's social capital influence the chances of students dropping out of high school. The more social capital the parents and local community possess, the less likely the child is to drop out of school.

The concept of social capital helps to frame this study because social capital in a gentrified community could potentially benefit public housing residents both environmentally and educationally. Many scholars and policymakers maintain that low-income persons can benefit from being surrounded by middle-class social capital. As Putnam (2000) pointed out in *Bowling Alone*, the most beneficial access to social capital would be for a person with many connections who lives in a well-connected community. However, "a poorly connected individual may derive some of the spill-over benefits from living in a well-connected community" (p. 20). There is potential for low-income individuals in a higher-income community to form relationships and networks with middle-class residents that could theoretically prove beneficial.

For school-age children from public housing in Hoboken, middle-class social capital has the potential to influence many aspects of their lives. Attending socioeconomically diverse schools or playing with children from higher-income backgrounds could create middle-class social capital for them if it were occurring. Social capital might also be harnessed through parental involvement in the schools, which could potentially benefit all

students and the school system. In addition, as children get older, they are influenced by their neighborhood and neighbors; thus, a middle-class neighborhood may wield long-term influence (Ellen & Turner, 1997).

Yet, the advantaged may also use their middle-class social capital to benefit themselves at the expense of those with different social capital. In education, for instance, this could result in the advantaged using social networks to establish or access particular public schools, while those without the same social networks do not access them, as is the case in Hoboken.

Public housing residents have their own social capital, which is evident in this study. Their social networks can function as social controls that keep children in public housing in Hoboken safe and comfortable. However, this is not the kind of social capital that American institutions value, and the influence of middle-class social capital (which is highly valued and rewarded) on education, government, and housing policy may lead to situations that actually undermine the social capital of public housing residents. Neoliberal policies such as waning support for traditional public housing could lead to the breakup of public housing and the loss of these social networks in Hoboken.

Cultural Capital

Like social capital, *cultural capital* refers to nonmonetary capital that is beneficial to individuals. Cultural capital can include educational background and education credentials, personal experience, cultural values or knowledge, an understanding and appreciation of possessions (such as artwork or books), and use of language, habitus, and taste. Cultural capital is generally acquired over time and is directly related to status in society. The term was first used by Bourdieu in the 1970s as he attempted to understand how the successes of children were tied to their social class. Bourdieu (as cited in New Learning, 2012, para. 5) explained the connection between social class and cultural experiences:

> The statistics of theatre, concert, and, above all, museum attendance (since in the last case, the effect of economic obstacles is more or less nil) are sufficient reminder that inheritance of cultural wealth which has been accumulated and bequeathed by previous generations only really belongs (although it is theoretically offered to anyone) to those endowed with the means of appropriating it for themselves.

Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) argued that education—both formal and informal—serves to maintain the power structure through reproducing inequalities.

It is widely recognized that cultural capital can greatly influence students' success in school and in life. Bourdieu maintained that the capital

that students accumulate outside of school influences their success inside school. Success, he argued, is not based on innate ability or even money alone, but instead on capital obtained through one's own background. Similarly, Bernstein (1971, 2007) looked at the effect of social class on academic outcomes. He stated that children are socialized in the speech of their parents, which stems from the division of labor by socioeconomic class. People from different class backgrounds have different codes, and lower-income students likely do not have access to the codes that allow middle-class students success in school (Bernstein, 1971, 2007). Willis (1981) argued in *Learning to Labor* that working-class boys are part of a subculture that results in their actively attaining in their adult lives the same social status as their parents.

In *Unequal Childhoods*, Lareau (2003) examined the differences in child-rearing practices of middle-class, working-class, and poor parents. Lareau noted that middle-class parents engage in concerted cultivation, while poor and working-class parents are more likely to facilitate natural growth in their children. These differences can be seen in the way in which middle-class children spend their free time in lessons and other organized activities, while working-class and poor children are more likely to have unstructured time surrounded by extended family. Lareau argued that middle-class children learn from a young age how to advocate for themselves, question authority, and look adults in the eye (as opposed to poor children, who are socialized to understand that looking others in the eye is dangerous (Anderson, 1990)). Lareau posited that the experiences of middle-class children benefit them in interactions with institutions.

Cultural capital is relevant to this case study of Hoboken. Wealthy parents can, and do, bequeath cultural capital to their children in the ways in which Bourdieu, Bernstein, and Lareau posited, but the question is whether this capital can also benefit other children in the schools and community. In Hoboken, if the advantaged merely utilize their own middle-class cultural capital to the advantage of their children, then living in a gentrified neighborhood will not be beneficial and could even be harmful for children with lower social class cultural capital. However, if this cultural capital is used in the community to provide sociocultural opportunities for the entire community and low-income public housing residents are able to, and do, take advantage of it, this could be beneficial to children in public housing. Youth in public housing may also gain middle-class cultural capital by living in a middle-class community if they access the amenities of the middle class, something this research shows is occurring in Hoboken. However, in a gentrified community, it is also possible that the type of cultural capital that children from lower-income families possess is less understood and respected, which could lead to further isolation and discrimination.

Political Economy of Place

The argument for the political economy of place is that low-income people can benefit from living near or with residents who have more economic, social, and cultural capital because those people wield influence that results in better goods and services for the community at large. Low-income urban neighborhoods have experienced disinvestment, marginalization, and neglect, which influences the environment and education of children in these communities (Anyon, 1997, Wacquant, 2008). Therefore, gentrification in communities, or a mixing of incomes, could lead to increased goods and services such as higher-quality supermarkets, banking options, a greater police presence, higher-quality teachers, better school facilities, and increased municipal services (Joseph et al., 2007). These changes could benefit children from low-income families in a community such as Hoboken. As Ellen and Turner (1997) maintained, public school quality is one piece of the political economy of place that is of particular importance because children from low-income backgrounds are likely to have parents who cannot afford to send them to private school and may not have the educational background themselves to supplement a subpar education. However, with improved services would theoretically come improved schools. This book examines the extent of this in Hoboken.

This same wielding of capital to influence outside actors could also be used to the detriment of the low-income population (Joseph et al., 2007). This could be the case particularly in a community such as Hoboken, where the low-income residents are a numerical and racial minority. Also, in Hoboken, the low-income public housing population resides predominantly in one area of the mile-square city, which could allow for a difference in quality and quantity of services even within such a small space—something upon which HHA residents commented. As Joseph et al. (2007, p. 394) stated, "The particular needs and priorities of low- versus higher-income residents may differ substantially, and the unequal distribution of power and influence among residents . . . may exacerbate such differences and lead to differential benefits that favor those with more influence." This research examines the ways in which the participation, market demands, and pressure from higher-income residents both benefit and do not benefit the education and environment of children in public housing in Hoboken.

Methods

This book reports a multimethod, qualitative, single case study of the experiences of youth in public housing in Hoboken. The methods for this research included ethnographic observations, semistructured interviews, a

focus group, participatory research with youth in public housing, family case studies, and analysis of existing data sets and archival sources. Like other scholars in this field (Anderson, 1990; DeSena & Ansalone, 2009; Sharman, 2006), I chose to study the city in which I reside. I have lived in Hoboken for five years, three blocks from the public housing neighborhood and less than one block from the school that serves the majority of children in public housing.

My ethnographic observations included direct observation, member research, and participant observation, all of which took place over a three-and-a-half-year period. My direct observations took place in a wide variety of settings throughout the community. In addition to direct observation, as a community member and mother of a child, many of my observations were conducted while going through my daily routines in the community. In this capacity, I was a member-researcher (Adler & Adler, 1987).

I am a white, middle-class community member. Although I am a community insider with access to many advantaged families, the focus of my research is youth who reside in public housing. In order to work with these young people and their families and maximize opportunities for their perspectives to be presented, I conducted participant observations at a center (herein referred to as Center) that is adjacent to the public housing campus and whose mission is to serve the children of that neighborhood. Over the course of data collection, I volunteered with them in a variety of capacities and I acted as a *participant as observer* (Glesne, 2006). The relationship formed with the Center (a trusted institution in the public housing community) and the children who attend their programs enabled me to recruit participants for the study and helped me to share the perspectives of the youth and their families, who are the true experts on this topic.

In addition, 66 people took part in interviews, a focus group, or a case study. I conducted two in-depth case studies, one focus group, and 50 interviews with 56 persons. The study participants were not a representative sample of Hoboken; instead, I purposefully oversampled public housing residents and non-Asian minorities because they are the focus of the study and the population whose experiences are most different from my own. As a result, 51 percent of participants were residents (or former residents) of the HHA, 54 percent were residents or (former residents) of HHA or subsidized housing in Hoboken, 61 percent were low-income, and 67 percent were African Americans or Latinos. Other participants included 12 charter school advocates (founders and administrators, founding parents, and teachers), 5 district school advocates, 1 adult who worked with children in public housing, a realtor, and 13 advantaged parents.[5]

Subjects in a study about the education of youth in public housing should be the youth themselves, who can act as participant experts (Harding,

1998; Smith, 1999, 2006; Torre & Fine, 2006). With that in mind, I worked closely with a group of teenagers from the Center to involve ten black and Latino youth from public housing (two from subsidized housing, eight from the HHA campus, six female and four male) in a participatory role as key informants. The methods loosely followed an established participatory style in the field of research into children and the environment (Loukaitou-Sideris, 2003; Lynch, 1977; Ward, 1978). The young people all sat for interviews and then participated in additional projects. Some mapped their community, listed descriptive words about their community, and/or used disposable cameras that I supplied to take pictures of their community, which they then captioned. I chose these multiple avenues for collecting data to invite a relationship with the teenagers, but also to provide a variety of complementary formats for data (Darbyshire et al., 2005).

I also conducted two case studies with mothers who volunteered to be a part of the research. I deliberately selected two families that represented the complexity of inequality in Hoboken. I put out a call for volunteers to participate in case studies to two social media/Internet parent group sites and reached out to parents on those sites. I asked for parents with a child entering kindergarten who had applied to a charter school for the upcoming year so I could assess preschool participation, to which schools they applied for kindergarten (including charter schools), and how admission to charter schools would influence their educational and housing decisions. The case studies are not meant to represent all of the stories in this book or even extremes; they were chosen to highlight some of the many issues and to provide a narrative for the data that showcases its complexity.

The identities of all participants are confidential. Although it is a city, Hoboken has the feel of a small town. Residents often say "everyone knows everyone." In this book, names are not used to identify participants. The only time individuals are identified by name is when statements were made publically rather than in interviews. Because some groups (such as founders from a specific charter school or school administrators) were small and therefore more easily identifiable, when possible, I group them to make it difficult to identify which individual made the statement.

For the case studies, I used pseudonyms and changed a few details about each family, to maintain the confidentiality of the participants. The changed details do not influence the overall narrative, but they do make it difficult to identify the families.

I was not able to redact the name of the city in which this research takes place. While many sociologists of education use pseudonyms for cities, this would have been impossible for this research, which is not just about education but also about the physical environment. This city is distinct in its location, degree of gentrification, and overall size. Researchers into the

built environment name the places in which they conduct research because it is relevant. The youth researchers use mapping and photography, which are place-based research methods, and their data reveal the location. The fact that this research is transparent and deals with my own neighbors has created a level of caution and vigilance in conducting and analyzing the research. In addition, a draft of my research was sent to select participants as a form of member checking.

The decision to use pseudonyms for the schools was a challenge. I did not conduct formal observations of any sort with the students or the teachers inside the Hoboken district or charters schools in any official capacity. This book is not about what is occurring in schools but about parents' *perceptions* of schools. Since this is a small city and the names of the schools could be easily found if one made the effort or were familiar with the community, pseudonyms initially seemed pointless. As I thought about this book being in print, however, I realized that I did not want the names of schools that children in the community attend/attended to have additional negative press of any sort. Education is politicized in this community, and I do not want my work or quotations from it to be used as political pawns. I also do not want quotations about the schools taken out of context or used by parents who are trying simply to avoid certain types of schools. For this reason, pseudonyms are used for the names of the schools throughout the book. It is my hope that people read this book not as a book about these six schools in this one city, but about the systemic issues at play in urban education and life.

While I will never be a true insider ("born and raised"), my status as a resident and mother in the community granted me access and in-depth understanding of community dynamics. I will never understand the experiences of low-income people of color who live in public housing in Hoboken (as one of my participants pointed out when he grudgingly told me to switch places with him if I want to know what it is like). I am mindful of this and of the long history of racial oppression in the United States, which is in the background, and often the foreground, of all that I do. However, it is important to do this work and to share the voices of all in the community, particularly those who have been disenfranchised and segregated and unfortunately are still underrepresented in academia.

When I moved to Hoboken five years ago with my husband, it was just a convenient place to live. When I chose to focus my research on Hoboken, I did not consider it a study of "my town" so much as "an interesting town in which I lived." As time went by and we started a family and I began to meet many neighbors for this research, I realized that I would be facing numerous challenges in writing a book about a community that had slowly become "my town." I see residents whom I interviewed for this book at

the playground, while sitting on my front stoop, on social media, and at community meetings. Sometimes they email me with updates or interesting school issues or invite me to social functions. As a researcher working to maintain objectivity, this can be a challenge. Throughout this book, I make it my goal to let the residents of Hoboken tell their truths. While certainly influenced by my own bias, personal background, and experiences, this book is as much as possible their story without my interpretations.

During my research, charter schools in Hoboken were consistently a controversial issue. Early on, there was controversy surrounding the application for a new charter school and later the application for extension of an existing school that had residents on each side upset with one another. Admittedly, at times during my interviews, I felt like Cucchiara (2013, p. 224), who described herself as "rooting for both sides." At one point during an interview, a participant asked me, "Who is telling the truth?" It is my hope that everyone told me "their truth." It is my role as a researcher and an academic to report all of these truths without slant or vitriol. It is also important to state that this book is critiquing the systematic structures that promote inequity in this community, not the agents who are taking advantage of this established structure.

This research deals with very real situations and policy proposals that affect the lives of all residents of Hoboken. I hope that I can present the perspective of a community that, although overflowing with social and cultural capital of its own, is seen as lacking the middle-class capital that is valued and powerful in the institutions that I examine and that influence their lives. I utilized a research design that, whenever possible, allowed me to speak with residents and use their words and interpretations, not my own. I was particularly committed to giving young people in Hoboken a voice and a role in the research through their words, photographs, and maps.

Structure of the Book

First, this book examines the history and current demographics of Hoboken, a postgentrified community that includes a socioeconomic and racial minority of low-income public housing residents.[6] Chapter 2 also presents the history of public housing in Hoboken. Chapter 3 tells the story of two children in Hoboken, whose family's stories demonstrate the complexity of the issues and the unevenness of opportunities for young people. This chapter introduces the reader to the types of educational and environmental issues that are addressed in later chapters.

Chapters 4 and 5 examine the state of education for children in Hoboken public housing. Chapter 4 describes school choice in the district-run public schools, and chapter 5 looks specifically at the charter schools. These

chapters rely heavily on the words of the participants to clarify why parents make the school choices they do and how these choices maintain segregation. Each chapter ends with a section entitled "What Can Be Done" that examines realistic approaches to addressing the issues raised in that chapter locally and, when appropriate, outside of the local context.

Chapters 6 and 7 analyze the environmental experiences of life in a gentrified community for youth in public housing, as well as issues of social and physical isolation. These chapters are based on the youth participatory research, which involved interviews, photography, and mapping. Both of these chapters conclude with a "What Can Be Done" section. Chapter 8 looks at the connection between education policy and real estate that results in *prolonged gentrification*, or the longer periods of time advantaged parents are staying in Hoboken to reap the social and economic benefits of free preschool or charter schools and how that influences community demographics and economics.

Chapter 9 assesses the issues overall and posits potential steps to achieve equal opportunity. Although Hoboken is a distinctive city and the findings in this book are not generalizable from a single case, similar phenomenon in other urban areas are cited throughout.

Chapter Two

From the "Armpit of Hudson County" to the "Gold Coast": Hoboken, New Jersey

On the Hudson River waterfront in Hoboken, New Jersey, there is a simple memorial that features a bronze propeller. The plaque beneath it reads,

> We, the surviving workers of the Hoboken "working waterfront" dedicate this shipyard to the tens of thousands of shipyard workers, longshoremen, dock builders, teamsters, tug, barge and ferry boat crews, deep water sailors, railroad crews and the support men and women who made the Hoboken 'working waterfront' and our City of Hoboken.

This memorial to the past, set against a stunning view of the midtown Manhattan skyline, sits between a shining new hotel and a series of waterfront luxury apartment complexes. Every day, well-dressed bankers race by it to catch the ferry to Wall Street, women pushing expensive jogging strollers run past, and professional dog walkers stroll by with their pedigree charges. This plaque, and the people who walk past it every day, represents the changes that have come to Hoboken.

Over the past 50 years, Hoboken has undergone a dramatic transformation, as this small city in the shadow of Manhattan has experienced wholesale changes in its economic and cultural landscape. This chapter summarizes these changes and examines the demographics of Hoboken, the history and possible future of public housing in the city, and how the case of *Abbott v. Burke* has had educational and environmental consequences for the community.

Brief History of Hoboken

Hoboken, known as the Mile Square City (although its actual land area is 1.28 square miles), sits across the Hudson River from Manhattan. It

extends from the Hudson River on its east side to the Palisades cliffs on the west and is limited by Jersey City to the south and west, Union City to the west, and Weehawken to the north. The population is slightly more than 50,000.

It is said that Native Americans called the area Hopoghan Hackingh, the Land of the Tobacco Pipe, because the green stone in the area was useful for carving pipes. In 1658, Peter Stuyvesant purchased the land between the Hackensack and Hudson Rivers from the Lenni Lenape. After the land changed hands a few times, in 1784, Colonel John Stevens bought it and named it Hoboken. Stevens turned Hoboken into a playground for Manhattan's wealthy elite, portending the sort of reputation Hoboken would once again possess in the twenty-first century.

Hoboken became a place for the wealthy to escape the increasingly congested and diverse city. It was a resort community, a place to picnic by the water or even own a summer home (Hoboken Historical Museum and Cultural Center, 2012). Walkways were built along the riverfront and clubs and social organizations proliferated. Members of the Turtle Club, who included prominent figures such as Alexander Hamilton and Aaron Burr, were said to have "regaled themselves with turtle soup and sweet turtle meat, washed down with glasses of Madeira, sherry, punch, brandy and rum" (Samperi, 1977, p. 10). New Yorkers even came to Hoboken's parks to duel (Gabrielan, 2010). This resort town grew to include bakeries, taverns, cafes, candy shops, restaurants, hotels, and an amusement park (Samperi, 1977). All of this was possible because of technological advancements that facilitated travel between Manhattan and Hoboken. Hoboken became a city in 1855. By 1878, it had four numerically named public schools (Dickinson, 1878).

As a result of the Industrial Revolution and the city's waterfront location, Hoboken would become a rail-and-water transportation hub. In its industrial heyday, "Factories outnumbered telephone booths, longshoremen walked to work, and people sitting on stoops knew it would rain when they smelled the coffee brewing at the Maxwell House factory" (DePalma, 1990, p. B1). Tea bags, coffee, steel, pencils, Wonder Bread™, and Tootsie Rolls™ (made by American Sweets®) were produced in Hoboken. It was a "bustling port" with factories, railroad, some 270 saloons, and mansions on Castle Point owned by "shipping magnates and robber barons" (Barry & Derevlany, 1987, p. xvi). Because of factors such as available industrial work, ports, and its location near Ellis Island, Hoboken became increasingly diverse, boasting a sizable German, Irish, and later Italian immigrant population. In 1910, 70,000 people lived in Hoboken; during World War II, 100,000 people worked here during the day (Barry & Derevlany, 1987). In 1934, 38 percent of residents in Hoboken paid between $10.00 and $19.99

a month in rent, while at the upper end, 4 percent of residents paid between $50.00 and $74.99 (State of New Jersey State Housing Authority, 1934).

Hoboken's twentieth-century history mirrors that of many northeastern cities in the United States. In the second half of the twentieth century, the face of the city began to change. In 1917, the Jones Act gave citizenship to Puerto Ricans, leading to a large increase in the number of Puerto Ricans in the New York City metropolitan area. Then the Johnson-Reed Immigration Act of 1924 severely restricted immigration from Europe. As a result of these acts, airline travel, and push factors in Puerto Rico, the population in Hoboken became increasingly Puerto Rican. Ziegler-McPherson (2011, p. 138) explained that many Puerto Ricans in Hoboken saw their time in the continental United States as temporary and had an "attitude of transience."

Potential employment in factories attracted Puerto Ricans to Hoboken. The Tootsie Roll Company even advertised in Puerto Rico to recruit workers to Hoboken (Henry, 2002). The 1940s through 1960s saw increasing numbers of Puerto Ricans moving into Hoboken (Gale, 2006; Ziegler-McPherson, 2011). As Puerto Ricans arrived, tension arose between the newcomer Puerto Ricans and the "old" immigrants, who were competing for jobs that were rapidly disappearing to the suburbs of western and southern New Jersey.

In the postwar era, as technology advanced—specifically, the containerization of ship cargo and air travel—Hoboken's industries began to decline (Hoboken Historical Museum and Cultural Center, 2012). Shipping now required more space than Hoboken's docks could offer. By the late 1960s, even large companies such as Tootsie Rolls and Lipton Tea, which had been Hoboken based since the nineteenth century, departed (Ziegler-McPherson, 2011). After World War II, as companies left the city, many Hoboken residents also departed for the suburbs, moving into single-family homes with yards and automobiles. The Italian immigrant and other white working-class populations decreased.

In the mid-twentieth century, urban areas in the United States in general began to decline. Cities were hurt by a lack of federal and state support and increased support for suburbanization. After World War II, the inner city became an increasingly isolated home for the poor. This was a particularly challenging time for Puerto Ricans, whose educational backgrounds left them reliant on jobs in the depleting industrial economy. Other factors contributed to the decline of urban areas during this time: the migration of blacks fleeing violent racism in the South and seeking work in Northern cities, segregation, federal programs that encouraged suburbanization of both manufacturing and families, white flight, discriminatory housing policies, and increasingly failing schools (Anyon, 1997).

In 1949, the HHA was founded, and in the 1950s public housing projects were constructed in Hoboken. According to Barry and Derevlany (1987, p. xvii), "By 1971, the thriving port of Hoboken had dwindled to a single cargo pier." and by 1975, a mere 15,000 people worked in Hoboken during the daytime. By 1970, Puerto Ricans reportedly made up 40 percent of the population in Hoboken (Henry, 2002) and had a 40 percent unemployment rate (Barry & Derevlany, 1987).

These demographic and economic changes generated problems in Hoboken. As in many other cities, crime increased as the disenfranchised were left behind in cities. In the 1970s, "Hoboken was so broken down that some residents feared for their lives" (Hu, 2007, para. 1). A survey in 1971 found that drugs, crime, and housing conditions were the major concerns of residents (Barry & Derevlany, 1987). Hoboken was called by some the "armpit of Hudson County" (Foster, as cited in Holl, 2007, para. 4) with "the lowest per capita income, highest unemployment, [and the] lowest education levels" (para. 6). It also had the highest per capita welfare rate, and 90 percent of those who were working made $2.50 an hour or less. Hoboken residents had the highest rates of diseases in New Jersey, including heart disease, respiratory disease, tuberculosis, and diabetes. According to Barry and Derevlany (1987, p. ix), in the 1970s, the perception of Hoboken was that "[it] was not a city—it was a punch line, a place synonymous with Nowheresville." As Paul Samperi (2008, p. 33) recollected, Hoboken "was a city that was dying. It was kind of sad to see."

In an era that showed no shortage of urban unrest, in 1971, in Hoboken, Puerto Rican residents, upset with their socioeconomic status (SES) and treatment by the police department, held sit-ins and demonstrations (Barry & Derevlany, 1987, p. xix). Indicative of the social unrest of the time, the remaining white longshoremen, upset with these events and with the mayor's reaction, "counter-rioted" and "demanded to be deputized and issued guns" (p. xix). The mayor did not agree to this (and then lost in the next election).

A few decades later, this trend reversed in Hoboken. Yet gentrification and demographic change did not occur overnight. In 1975, an article in the Lifestyle Section of the *Sunday Record* featured the story of early brownstone gentrifiers. "It's a lot like saying prunes. A lot of people laugh when you mention Hoboken," one resident was quoted as saying (Kerr, 1975, p. B-1). Hoboken was featured in the 1973 book *You Don't Have to be Rich to Own a Brownstone.* Appendix I lists "New York City brownstone areas and Hoboken, New Jersey" (Wilkes & Wilkes, 1973, p. 97). In this book, brownstones in Hoboken are listed as costing $20,000–$30,000 and the community is described: "Just across the river from New York is an interesting and burgeoning renovation area" (p. 128). Interested buyers were given contacts in Hoboken for further information, as well as a list

of places to find items such as wooden moldings, antique mantels, and brownstone masonry paint.

These early waves of gentrifiers in Hoboken often fit the typical profile of gentrification. They were moving into a community that was seen by the white middle class as edgy and up and coming. "It's richly ornamented brownstones may be one of the few remaining vestiges of the good life that was lived there" (Kerr, 1975, p. B-1). In the mid-1970s, the once-thriving waterfront was described as the "now gloomy, skeletal pier" (p. B-1).

Residents felt confident and excited about the changes coming to Hoboken and hopeful for its future. New residents liked the diversity and small-town feel of the community. One resident shared that, fresh out of art school, he and his wife moved to Hoboken in 1980 because they enjoyed the ambience.

> For what we could afford as a recent art school graduate and someone moving down without a job just looking. There's nothing that we could afford in Manhattan that felt safe or that I could bring my wife to, and Hoboken solved that for us. It felt urban and ethnic and all the things we kind of wanted . . . We were renting at $300 a month for a third-floor apartment. Nice Italian family downstairs . . . I went to [selective college]. So I had just graduated and was making $12,000 a year.

After renting for a while, they could not afford to buy a home on their own so, together with a friend, they bought and rehabilitated one, eventually trading up for the brownstone where they live today.

Many of those who fixed up brownstones were from the outside, such as the one cited earlier, but native Hobokenites were rehabilitating properties as well. Natives were happy about some of the changes, as one said, "The brownstone revival is the best thing to happen here. Hoboken is up again, and it's wonderful" (Kerr, 1975, continued from p. B-1). These natives and new residents benefited from a 3 percent Municipal Home Improvement loan through the HUD Model Cities Program. Model Cities programs began in 1966 as an attempt to improve cities in the midst of urban unrest. Model Cities received planning grants and, if approved by HUD, funding. Through this program, Hoboken received $3.5 million. In 1971, this program in Hoboken included a home improvement loan program. By 1978, 800 Hoboken residents had received these low-interest loans (Bierbaum, 1980). A 1975 *New York Times* article entitled "Hoboken—Somehow, both Private and Friendly" described development in Hoboken as "massive private development aided and guaranteed by the Federal Government, mainly through Model Cities" (p. 43). Gentrifiers at this time were described as a "new breed of activist, running the Y camp for underprivileged children and campaigning for school improvement" (p. 43).

Hoboken's reputation was slowly shifting. By 1976, there were annual house tours (Portman, 1977). A 1980 *New Jersey Monthly* article with pictures of a well-decorated home read, "The owners of this fashionable townhouse shown here had searched Manhattan for a year" ("Home Sweet Hoboken," 1980, p. 115). A burgeoning art scene developed in Hoboken in the 1970s and 1980s and, as is often the case, paved the way for more gentrification that became increasingly apparent in the 1980s and 1990s. As crime statistics decreased, real estate prices increased.

Development that began with the revival of historic brownstones began to shift as well. "Once revitalization made Hoboken a 'desirable' place to live, market forces exploded, sometimes with dire consequences. Around 1980, there was a rash of suspected arson-for-profit fires, and tenements began to be converted to condominiums at a breath-taking rate" (Axel-Lute, 2001, para. 6). Bill Bergin (2012), a retired fireman and deputy chief, described the prevalence of fires in the 1980s. He pointed out that many of the fires were in buildings that would later become condominiums but that there was a lack of convictions due to the difficulties associated with proving fault. Between March 1978 and November 1981, 41 people, including 30 children, died in arson-related Hoboken fires—with no convictions. Sister Norbetta was quoted in the *New York Times* in 1981, "Is this the price we have to pay for renaissance?" (as cited in Laura, 1981, para. 9). Eventually, developers simply bought out existing tenants (Axel-Lute, 2001).

The public conversation about changes in Hoboken and other gentrifying communities quickly became more cautious and pessimistic. It was becoming increasingly apparent that Hoboken's factories and the employment opportunities and opportunity for social mobility for the working class that they offered were gone. This post-Fordist society would not be an easy adjustment for many. In 1978, articles detailed the eviction of 16 senior residents from the Hoboken Seamen's Home when administrators sold the property for $155,000; it was replaced by a supermarket. This was described in the *Jersey Journal* as "the last gasp of the tough and colorful culture built around Hoboken's shipping industry since the beginning of the century" ("Old Sailors Cut Adrift," 1978, p. 3). Rudi Judd, an 86-year-old seaman, asked, "Where can we go? The places are all so expensive, there is nowhere left for us." Joe Schalk, another seaman, concluded, "We lost our anchor" (p. 3).

In 1981, a *New York Times* article titled "Hoboken: Change Bringing Problems" (Schept, 1981) detailed the fear felt by longtime Hoboken residents over "condomania." At that time, a one-bedroom condominium on Bloomfield Street cost $70,000, when in 1978, a four-story Victorian home on the same street had cost that amount. In 1981, there were 41

condominium units; by 1986, that number had grown to close to 2,000 (Barry & Derevlany, 1987).

This gentrification led to displacement of residents, as well as homelessness and racial, socioeconomic, and generational tensions that continue in 2014. "It was always our city, our town . . . now all of a sudden it isn't. It's a Greenwich Village West. How many of them look down at us poor deprived people. We don't need them telling us how to eat with a fork" (Miss Ratti, as cited in Schept, 1981, p. 16). Letters to the editor of the *Hoboken Reporter* reflected many of the conflicts between old timers and gentrifiers and were published in Barry and Derevlany's 1987 book *Yuppies Invade My House at Dinnertime*. Gentrification influenced the racial and ethnic makeup of Hoboken, which led to a decrease in the Puerto Rican population (Duroy, 1990).

In the 1990s and 2000s, when development in Hoboken led to increased prices in the most desirable parts of the city, gentrification turned into supergentrification (Lees, 2003) and artists and hipsters left Hoboken in search of more affordable neighborhoods, such as Jersey City. This supergentrification is particularly evident along the waterfront in uptown Hoboken. Yet, at the turn of the century, Hoboken was considered "the poster child for gentrification in the eastern U.S." (Axel-Lute, 2001, para. 1). Hoboken was viewed as a prime example of a "rags-to riches transformation" (Hu, 2007).

A walk through Hoboken in 2014 tells a tale of two cities. It is a predominantly wealthy, upper-middle-class, well-educated, white collar, white community. However, there is still a sizable economic and racial minority (11 percent) who live below the poverty level (US Census Bureau, 2012). Yet to walk along Hoboken's waterfront on a beautiful summer day, it appears that Hoboken is once again filling its historical role as a "playground for the elite." On a recent walk along the waterfront, I encountered a new "food" truck company building hype for their "pupcakes," delicious-looking cupcakes—for dogs—at $15 a dozen. Advantaged residents push expensive baby strollers, sunbathe, run 5K races, drink frozen cocktails, and eat gourmet food from food trucks on a pier overlooking Manhattan.

In 2014, Hoboken's once-thriving industrial waterfront is lined with expensive apartment complexes, corporate office buildings, and the W Hotel. Beyond the waterfront are myriad restaurants, taverns, boutiques, and the many brownstones and luxury buildings. Hoboken is no longer known as a shipping hub; it is perhaps best known today for exporting expensive elaborate cakes from Carlo's Bakery, the subject of the reality show *Cake Boss* filmed in Hoboken. Like most urban areas today, Hoboken is not the same city it was in the first half of the twentieth century.

Demographics of Hoboken

Hoboken's transition from an industrial city to modern-day "playground for the elite" is evident in the numbers. In 2010, Hoboken had 50,005 residents, with a median age of 31.1 years. Hoboken is a young city, with 50.4 percent of residents between the ages of 18 and 35 years. It is a majority white city; 82.2 percent white, 7.1 percent Asian, 3.5 percent black or African American, and 15.2 percent Hispanic/Latino (figure 2.1).

Hoboken is a predominantly white-collar community; 72.4 percent of the residents have a bachelor's degree or higher (compared to 35 percent for New Jersey), with 24.1 percent of those working in the FIRE (finance, insurance, or real estate) industries. About 89.9 percent of residents work in managerial and professional or sales and office jobs, while 6.1 percent work in service occupations and 4 percent in construction, extraction, and maintenance and production, transportation, and material moving occupations. In Hoboken, 20.5 percent of residents make an annual salary of $200,000 or more. The median home value for owner-occupied units is $567,700 and the median family income is $104,789 (compared to the New Jersey average of $71,180; US Census Bureau, 2012).

As Peter "Chipper" Falco (2013, p. 7) noted, "This is a town for forty and under." Figure 2.2 shows that Hoboken's population is dominated by residents between the ages of 18 and 45. Stevens Institute of Technology is

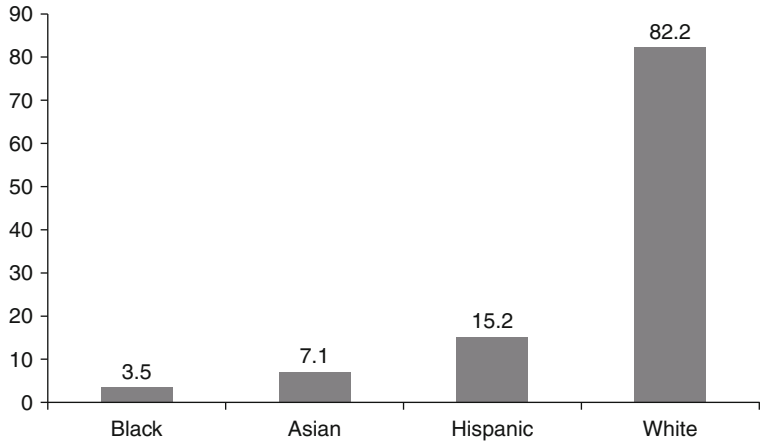


Figure 2.1 Percentages of Hoboken residents by race.

Note: These numbers do not total 100%; these are selected categories and there is overlap.

Source: *Data Dictionary, Census 2010: Statistics, Hoboken, NJ,* by US Census Bureau (2013), retrieved from http://www.socialexplorer.com.proxy.libraries.rutgers.edu/pub/reportdata/TableSelection.aspx?Census=2010&Reportid=R10469921.

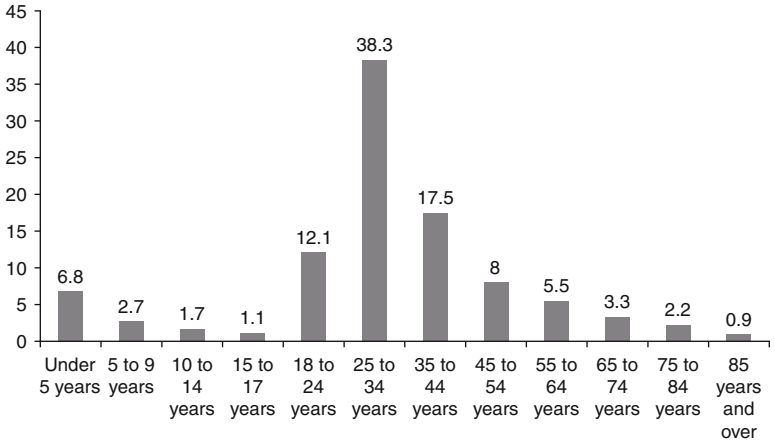


Figure 2.2 Percentages of Hoboken residents by age.

Source: *Data Dictionary, Census 2012: Statistics, Hoboken, NJ,* by US Census Bureau (2013), retrieved from http://www.socialexplorer.com.proxy.libraries.rutgers.edu/pub/reportdata/TableSelection.aspx?Census=2010&Reportid=R10469921.

located in Hoboken, which increases the number of college-age residents. The percentage of school-age children decreases significantly as children get older, a phenomenon that is explored in chapter 4. The population of under-5-year-olds is 6.8 percent of the total population, while the entire age 5–18 population is 5.5 percent (US Census, 2013).

Demographics in Hoboken have changed since 2000, with an increased proportion of families with young children. Children younger than 5 years are a rapidly growing demographic in town; in 2000, they were just 3.2 percent of the population, but in 2010, they were 6.8 percent (Palasciano, 2013a). The large number of children under the age of 5 is apparent in the number of mothers and fathers pushing strollers. "The Stroller Mafia" is a term commonly used in this town to refer to large groups of advantaged mothers (Ritchey, 2010). A single male realtor reflected on the changing demographics in town and told me that the strollers lined up outside an establishment are "more intimidating than the bikes lined up outside a biker bar" (image 2.1).

Although more advantaged residents are staying and having babies in Hoboken, a large number of these families leave the city when their children are older. There are fewer older advantaged youth (loosely identified here as "white only") than younger. While there are 2,184 white children under 5, there are only 740 white children between the ages of 5 and 9, there are 287 white children between the ages of 10 and 14, and 183 white teenagers age 15–17 (US Census Bureau, 2012).

Image 2.1 "The Stroller Mafia," Hoboken (January 2013).
Source: M. Makris.

A larger percentage of children older than 5 are below the poverty level than those who are younger than 5, once again demonstrating the tendency of advantaged families to leave Hoboken as their children become older. For the under-5 group, 7.9 percent are below poverty; for the 5–17 group, 27.8 percent are below poverty level.

According to a local realtor interviewed for this study who tracks real estate data, the average sales price of a three-bedroom apartment in Hoboken in September 2012 was $800,000; the average sales price of a two-bedroom apartment was $525,000. "This doesn't include new construction, so if you add in the actual new construction being sold directly by the sales office . . . for example Toll Brothers. Anything being sold by Toll, add another 25% on to that. So a three-bedroom at Hudson Tea or Maxwell [Place] is well over a million."

Hoboken is predominantly a white middle- to upper-middle-class community. One advantaged woman interviewee who described herself as mixed ethnicity (black and Hispanic) reflected on the racial demographics in Hoboken:

> When I think about having a kid and being around in the day-time, I wonder if I would fit in with the moms. Especially being married to a white man

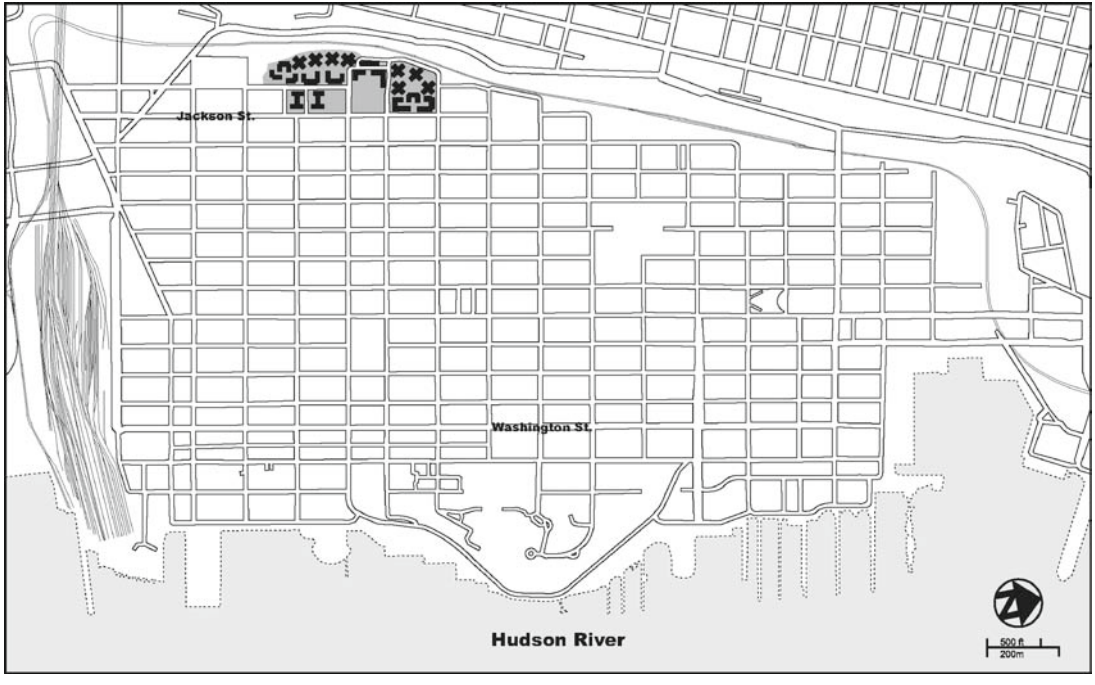
> there's a possibility my child will look different. So on the one hand I would stay in Hoboken because we are a mixed household and we're going to have a child who is mixed like me, so I would want to stay somewhere where there are other people of color [as opposed to less diverse suburbs] . . . When I walk around Hoboken in the daytime, like, where are the brown moms? But I say all that knowing we're so close to New York and the wonderful little city that we have.

In Hoboken today, the advantaged residents can stop by a gourmet food truck for their dog; they can sign this dog up for swim lessons or send the dog to summer camp on a farm, and they can utilize a pet taxi service to and from doggy day care. Advantaged mothers and fathers can send their designer strollers to the Stroller Spa for a full service cleaning for $89.99, attend music classes (or send nannies to attend) for newborns with live bands that cost $545 per session, and use day care facilities overlooking the Hudson River that have infant rooms with descriptions such as this: "As a child woke up from her nap, she looked up and listened to the flute player in her room. She stared and swayed to the sound of the familiar lullabies" (Beyond Basic Learning, 2011, para. 3). Despite the statistics, which demonstrate that Hoboken is a young, upper-middle-class community, and its reputation for successful gentrification, 11 percent of the population remains below the poverty line.

Public Housing in Hoboken

Set against the extreme wealth of Hoboken today, in the southwest corner of the Mile Square City sits the HHA main campus (map 2.1). Hoboken still has traditional low-rise and high-rise public housing buildings, none of which has been demolished (image 2.2).

Public housing in Hoboken, like in other urban areas, did not always serve the same purpose or population as it does today. As was the case in other cities, as the mid-twentieth century approached, there was an evident need for improved housing in Hoboken and the finances were available to meet that need. In 1934, of the 3,974 residential structures and 16,448 dwelling units in Hoboken, 9 percent were owner occupied, 6 percent had mechanical refrigeration, 79 percent had private indoor water closets, 50 percent did not have bathtubs and/or showers, 50 percent did not have hot and cold water, and 97 percent relied on coal oil fuel (State of New Jersey State Housing Authority, 1934). By 1948, Mayor DeSapio asserted a need for more and improved housing: "Hoboken still bears the residential earmarks of three quarters of a century ago" ("DeSapio Asserts," 1948, p. 19). There was also money for housing: dollars were available for low-cost housing, and private capital and employment options were available.



Map 2.1 Map of Hoboken highlighting the Hoboken Housing Authority (at top of map) and Jackson and Washington Streets.
Source: Created by Te-Sheng Huang.

Image 2.2 Hoboken Housing Authority main campus (March 2013).
Source: M. Makris.

American low-income public housing projects were intended to raise the living standards of the American urban poor. Across the United States, urbanization, industrialization, and immigration created congested and diverse cities. As a result, in the early twentieth century, middle-class and upper-class Anglo elites believed that cities were places desperately in need of reform (Hall, 2002). After 1929, poor tenement conditions were exacerbated by the Great Depression. Reformers used the Progressive-era idea that tenements threatened the health and welfare of cities to push for slum clearance and public housing (Bloom, 2008). During the Great Depression, the Works Progress Administration built 21,800 units of public housing for low-income families (Bickford & Massey, 1991). The

subsequent Federal Housing Acts of 1937, 1949, and 1954 increased the role of the federal government in providing low-income urban housing.

The Federal Housing Act of 1949 made large urban renewal projects possible. In cities throughout the United States, public housing projects replaced overcrowded tenements that often lacked hot water, private bathrooms, or toilets (Biles, 2000). Early public housing apartment complexes "compared favorably with commercially produced apartment building complexes of the day" (Von Hoffman, 1996, p. 428). Although not all public housing developments were of this high quality, they were all built to provide light and air and healthier living conditions. The buildings were sturdy and constructed to last. Under the Truman and Eisenhower administrations, tens of thousands of public housing units were built each year. Early in the process of public housing construction, these were walk-up buildings; when technology advanced, high-rise towers were built (Franck & Mostoller, 1995).

The HHA was established in 1949, with construction of public housing made possible through a grant under the Housing Act of 1949. Construction of public housing in Hoboken took place in the 1950s. On the main public housing campus, Andrew Jackson Gardens was built in 1952 and Harrison Gardens in 1959. There are 1,353 units of public housing on 28 properties in six locations. The main campus of the HHA (the focus of this research) comprises family housing—not senior housing—and is made up of 806 units in 21 buildings on 17 acres in the southwestern portion of the city. The developments that are the focus of this study are Andrew Jackson Gardens and Harrison Gardens. These units include 11 three-story garden apartments, 8 seven-story T high rises, and 2 ten-story H high rises.

These high rises were constructed in the popular public housing style of the time. These projects were clearly influenced by the modernist architectural ideas of Le Corbusier. They were built vertically and laid out in geometric patterns that contrasted with the street grid (Franck & Mostoller, 1995). These Corbusian Towers in the Park are made up of large, nearly identical brick buildings surrounded by grassy open space. The upkeep of this open green space was clearly a concern for management. Rule 7 of the resident Housing Authority handbook in 1952 stated, "Do not walk on the grass" (Housing Authority of the City of Hoboken, 1952, p. 8). This architectural design of public housing would later be vilified as views of, and policies for, public housing changed later in the twentieth century and this style of identical buildings with public green space fell out of favor.

Public housing has always been utilized and needed in Hoboken. In the 1950s, public housing residents paid a $10 refundable security deposit and had rents for families with minors ranging from $21 to $75 a month. Residents received a handbook with four full pages of detailed instructions on how to clean every surface and fixture in the apartments, with pop art

pictures of glamorous white men and women inserted (Housing Authority of the City of Hoboken, 1952).

Many senior Italian Hoboken residents grew up in public housing. On a number of occasions, I have heard statements such as, "You will never believe this, but I grew up there actually." These individuals described how their parents eventually made too much money and their families moved out of the HHA and into middle-income housing in Hoboken or out of Hoboken altogether. This is reflected in the late 1960s when the Annual Reports of the Housing Authority stated, "The most dire need in our community today is adequate housing for moderate-income families and middle-income families, who have been neglected" (Clyons, 1969). Some housing was constructed for the middle class to attempt to meet this need.

Mobility to the middle class was common for urban public housing's earliest residents. America's cities peaked in the 1930s, when more people lived in cities than outside them. However, in the second half of the twentieth century, changes occurred in America's urban centers. In the post–World War II era, with advances in technology, manufacturing industries—the soul of northern rust-belt cities—began to decline.

After the 1960s, the need for public housing did not disappear but the finances began to dwindle just as the demographics of the community changed and the job opportunities left. While immigrants to Hoboken had previously been able to find work and move their way into the middle class, now unskilled employment opportunities were rapidly disappearing. In the 1960s, many white Americans noted a "negative" transition in the clientele of public housing (Biles, 2000). Public opinion turned against low-income projects. This shift in thinking coincided with a demographic shift in public housing.

During this time period, suburbanization, deindustrialization, and racism had created a group of minority urban residents that would be challenged to break free of cyclical poverty. "To many Americans, residents and onlookers alike, public housing had metamorphosed into a dumping ground for society's unfortunates" (Biles, 2000, p. 152). "As soon as public housing became perceived as minority housing, it lost broad political support" (Bloom, 2008, p. 89).

As the demographics of public housing shifted and problems began to occur in public housing, people turned quickly against it. "Public housing became associated with the inner city, impoverished dependency, African Americans, and crime" (Von Hoffman, 1996, p. 436). Beginning in the 1960s, housing advocates began to move away from the idea of building public housing to help the urban poor. In 1961, Jane Jacobs wrote *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*. In this groundbreaking book, she described high-rise projects as "worse centers of delinquency, vandalism,

and general social hopelessness than the slums they were supposed to replace" (p. 4). She famously wrote, "This is not the rebuilding of cities. This is the sacking of cities" (p. 4).

Then, in 1972, Oscar Newman's highly influential *Defensible Space* built upon Jacobs's arguments and supported those who wanted to destroy large-scale public housing. Newman maintained that public housing high rises were unsafe because residents could not feel ownership of their homes or the land around them and it was impossible for residents to know other residents from intruders. He argued for creating defensible space, maintaining that when a large number of people share territory, each person feels less of a right to it (Newman, 1996). His theories had a great impact on public housing policies in the future and are seen in Hoboken today in the proposed Vision 20/20 Plan for the HHA.

Increasingly during this time, there were "stereotypical images of the city as a place where the socially pathological and undeserving poor live in lawless zones of concentrated poverty" (Crump, 2002, p. 581). As the government stopped supporting public housing, budgets for maintenance and services decreased. The problems with public housing in the 1970s across American cities included welfare concentration, corruption, shoddy construction, social disorder, and budgetary shortfalls (Bloom, 2008). Living conditions deteriorated badly in public housing across the urban United States. In the 1980s and 1990s, gang activity, proliferation of guns, and the crack epidemic began to deal painful blows to residents of public housing.

Beginning in the 1960s, housing officials cut budgets for public housing. With the Housing Act of 1961, public housing programs became increasingly decentralized. This act implemented rent subsidy programs and scattered site housing. Scattered site housing can be constructed only in small amounts, and it is more difficult to provide residents with social services and for them to experience collective efficacy.

In 1968, the Federal government stopped high-rise public housing construction. In the 1970s cuts to the social safety net became apparent. In 1973, Nixon placed a moratorium on funding for housing programs. The frozen funds were replaced with "federal sharing grants controlled by local elites who redirected them to the benefit of the real estate industry and property owners" (Wacquant, 2008, p. 84). President Clinton repealed a federal mandate for one-for-one replacement of demolished public housing.

In 1996, HUD began to support demolition of high-rise public housing projects. Neoliberal nonegalitarianism was evident as these shifts did not reflect a decrease in need for public housing but instead a decrease in the overall view of government's role in providing it.

These changes are evident in the historical records of the HHA. Annual reports in the 1970s and 1980s lamented budget cuts. Chairman Clyons

(1972) reported that Congress was cutting funding. Chairman Andrew Scherer (1976, p. 1) wrote, "We emphasize again the need to strengthen our public housing, not 'kill' it." In 1976, public housing was at 100 percent occupancy and the waiting list was growing. Scherer wrote they were initiating Section 8 for senior citizens. In 1980, the message from the chairman (Scherer, 1980, p. 1) was the same: 100 percent occupancy and "these families . . . [who] cannot help themselves from the economic squeeze of high rents, food prices, clothing and medical costs find the Projects as God-Sent and their salvation." In 1980, 195 Section 8 units were available for families and senior citizens. In 1982, Scherer's cries became more urgent: "The coming year . . . is even less promising; President Reagan, Congress, and the new Housing and Urban Development staff will be making additional over and above last year's cuts" (p. 1). Neoliberal changes to the financial support for public housing were evident. This occurred just at the time that gentrification had begun in the Mile Square City and in other cities across the United States.

The HHA has historically had a reputation in the community for malfeasance, and HHA residents are often perceived as political pawns. In 2005, an interim executive director of the HHA was named to clean up the HHA; he left within 3 days (Jennemann, 2005). In the local newspaper, the HHA board of commissioners is routinely described as overseeing the approval of "millions of dollars in contracts, and the buildings are a source of hundreds of votes for whichever candidates residents support" (DeChiaro, 2014, p. 11). During this research, in May 2014, the Housing Board voted to hire special counsel to investigate the HHA executive director for use of money awarded to contractors who had donated to his political campaign (he is also a New Jersey state assemblyman), prompting HUD to state that they would conduct a review (Davis, 2014).

Today, the public housing neighborhood in Hoboken is aesthetically more pleasing than traditional urban public housing is generally perceived to be. In fact, several advantaged Hobokenites with whom I spoke did not know that the garden apartments, with their mansard roofs and shutters, were public housing. The high rises, on the other hand, have the modernist "tower-in-the-park" feel of traditional public housing; as such, they are feared by many advantaged residents. This neighborhood is as far from the Hudson River and as far from Washington Street as possible while still within the confines of the city. The Hudson-Bergen Light Rail, Patterson Plank Road, and the Palisades cliffs provide a backdrop for public housing. In my research, the current executive director was often credited by residents with cleaning the buildings and making them more livable.

The HHA also administers 326 Section 8 vouchers, as well as the public housing buildings (Housing Authority of the City of Hoboken, 2012). In

the 1970s, Joseph Barry's company, Applied Housing, built approximately 800 subsidized housing units in Hoboken (Schept, 1981). Today, Applied Housing and the HHA are the two dominant affordable housing providers.

In Hoboken before gentrification, and in the early days of gentrification, advantaged residents considered it dangerous to live anywhere "west of Willow [Willow Street]" (an expression used by some interviewees). As gentrification gradually moved west of Willow Street and closer to the HHA campus, the area of Hoboken perceived as dangerous and undesirable by advantaged residents shrank. Now, $750,000 and $1 million condominiums abut the public housing campus on three sides (image 2.3). Also, the light rail used by advantaged residents is west of public housing, and there

Image 2.3 Hoboken Housing Authority building to the left of luxury housing (October 2011).

Source: M. Makris.

is a large ShopRite® just northeast of public housing. One of the HHA participants described the area around the Center: "They've gotten more rich over here, because this used to be a junkyard and now it's a condo." My field notes describe the atmosphere around public housing.

> On my way to the Center today, since it was nice out, I had the opportunity to observe a large number of people hanging out on Jackson Street [a street adjacent to the public housing campus]. There were older men gardening and young men hanging on Jackson Street eating and sitting in what looked like a LaZBoy or sofa chair in front of some of the strip mall stores. I noticed signs against loitering on the outside of some of these stores. Right next to public housing was a UHaul with two young white men moving into an apartment. Inside their UHaul I could see Mac computer boxes and expensive suitcases. (Field Notes, June 2011)

The streets bordering public housing—Monroe, Jackson, Marshall, and Harrison—are still considered "undesirable" by some advantaged residents. Advantaged Hoboken residents can frequently name, or are at least familiar with, all of the streets in Hoboken except those directly surrounding public housing. One woman, who had just bought a home on Madison Street (the street before Monroe when walking west), said, "I live on the last street in Hoboken," discounting the four streets west of her home. I had conversations with residents who do not want to go to parks on Jackson Street or are not interested in looking at real estate on Jackson Street. Frequent conversations in town, on blogs and other outlets, discuss whether it is safe to move to those streets, how safe it is for children, and the cost benefit of living on one of the streets near public housing. The local realtor interviewed explained,

> There is some resistance to being back on Madison and Monroe because of safety concerns, because there is more crime on the west side of town. But there are many families who recognize that in order to be able to get an apartment big enough that they can afford that that's the tradeoff they have to make. So, there's a relationship between location and price, and if they're willing to give up a little bit on the location they can get something more affordable.

There is a divide between the immediate area around public housing and the rest of Hoboken. Even though apartments owned by advantaged residents surround the campus, there remains a distinctly different feel to this area. Next to Mama Johnson Field is a live poultry store, Super Chicken®, with a distinct odor; across the street from the campus are two small strip malls that house the Big Banner Plaza with the Big Banner Super Market (a local market), a Chinese restaurant residents call the

"Chinese store," a dollar store, a liquor store, a nail salon, a pizza shop, and a Laundromat. It is a distinct visual contrast to the rest of Hoboken. One of the teenage participants described his neighborhood as "pretty unsanitary at times . . . alcohol bottles, cigarette butts, dog droppings, on occasion the chickens from over there will come running loose." One visitor whom I took on a walking tour of this area described it as feeling like a different country.

> This area contrasts to the sidewalks of Washington Street teeming with expensive strollers, outdoor cafes, and well-heeled gentry. For just a few short blocks I feel as if I am back in East Harlem or the South Bronx. As a White woman, I am suddenly a racial minority. (Field Notes, January 2013)
>
> Today I went into the Big Banner and was struck once again by similarities to East Harlem; the music, the food selection, the ambiance inside all felt like East Harlem, where I used to work. There is bulletproof glass surrounding the check cashing area. (Field Notes, January 2013)

Many advantaged residents express concern about safety in this areas and yet they are willing to "brave" it to play in middle-class social sports leagues or, in some cases, to even get more property for their money in home purchases. When I asked the advantaged whether they had walked around this area, the answer was usually negative, unless they lived in one of the apartment buildings very close by or played organized sports on the field.

Aesthetically and in social interactions, this area appears and feels different from the rest of Hoboken. It is also architecturally different because, typical of the design of traditional public housing complexes of this era, the superblock housing does not follow the grid of the streets (Franck & Mostoller, 1995). Looking west on many of the streets, the last thing seen in Hoboken is public housing high rises. Although there is now high-end private housing alongside public housing, the western side (the light rail, Patterson Plank Road, and the Palisades Cliffs) lends the main public housing campus an isolated feeling.

"Vision 20/20: A Sustainable Plan for Public Housing in Hoboken, NJ" was designed to completely transform the public housing neighborhood in Hoboken. According to the executive director, Garcia, "Vision 20/20 will be an inclusive, community-based process to take us from the projects to prosperity" (as cited in HHA & Marchetto Higgins Stieve PC, 2010, p. 8). This plan calls for harnessing private and public capital to turn the HHA campus into a "sustainable, transit-oriented, mixed-use, mixed-income neighborhood" (p. 8). They applied to be a Choice Neighborhood, the newest incarnation of HOPE VI.

This plan for the HHA involves demolishing existing housing to make way for mixed-income development. The plan calls for phased development defined as follows:

> At the completion of each phase, the number of new units would exceed the number of decommissioned units, ensuring that existing residents will not be displaced and, at the same time, providing for a variety of mixed-income housing options, allowing for upward mobility within the neighborhood and a deconcentration of poverty. (HHA & Marchetto Higgins Stieve PC, 2010, p. 69)

The plan also calls for creation of "homes, not public housing" (p. 75).

This plan won a New Jersey Future Award in Smart Growth in 2011. It clearly reflects current thinking on deconcentration of poverty (Goetz, 2011), as this quote from the chairman of the HHA, Jake Stuiver, shows: "There's sort of a general view that conglomerating all people in a community who are of a low-income level isn't good for them . . . It's a more positive approach to have people be among other people of different income levels" (as cited in LaMarca, 2012, para. 21)

I heard many opinions about this plan. Most of the interviews for this book were conducted before the plan became controversial in the community, so many with whom I spoke knew very little about it. Born-and-raised Hobokenites commented that they had been hearing rumors of this for years but it never happens; other public housing residents had heard that it is happening and expressed concerns and even fears about it. One HHA resident said that it sounds good to her as long as she can get a home there.

In December 2012, there was a Request for Qualifications (RFQ) for a developer of a new 44-unit rental residential building on the public housing campus. In the RFQ, this development was referred to as the "first phase" of the Vision 20/20 plan. In May 2013, the City Council did not issue a "resolution of need" that the executive director had requested to include in an application to bolster its chance of receiving low-income housing tax credit (Koeske, 2013). Mayor Zimmer argued that she could not support the plan at that time because of concerns about safety, accessibility, and transparency and a need to understand the entire project before the first phase could be supported (Zimmer, 2013). Controversy erupted when the Executive Director sued the mayor, including in the suit allegations of "ethnic cleansing" (Associated Press, 2013); vocal public housing residents came out in support of the plan.

Public housing and public housing policies have had and will continue to have an influence on the opportunities of young people in Hoboken. Public housing has for generations provided a home for children and

their families in cities like Hoboken. This housing deteriorated as the cities around them deteriorated, and yet these homes continued to provide shelter. Many cities have razed this housing but it remains in Hoboken and nearby New York City. Now that cities are increasingly popular with advantaged families, remaining public housing provides an opportunity for young people from the humblest of financial backgrounds to grow up in highly desirable locales, surrounded by advantaged children.

Just as public housing policies have changed alongside gentrification, so too has education policy. Yet, in New Jersey, legislation known as *Abbott*, like existing public housing, provides a cloak of protection for young people from low-income backgrounds.

Abbott v. Burke

The educational and environmental consequences of the *Abbott v. Burke* (*Abbott*) school finance equity case for Hoboken are explored in this book. Similar to other school finance cases that would antecede *Abbott*, such as the Campaign for Fiscal Equity in New York City, *Abbott* was based on the idea that low-income children in urban areas in New Jersey were getting a public school education grossly unequal to that of their peers in wealthy suburban districts. The lawyers argued that, because of school funding formulas based on property taxes, the neediest students in New Jersey had dilapidated school buildings, large class sizes, and underpaid and inexperienced teachers (Yaffee, 2007).

Abbott was a landmark lawsuit in New Jersey and in the nation. New Jersey made history with the *Abbott* decision by the New Jersey Supreme Court. After 30 years of battles over school financing and equity, the result was a progressive set of reforms and parity for 31 urban "Abbott Districts" in New Jersey. Hoboken was one of those districts.

This battle for equity began in 1970 with *Robinson v. Cahill* (*Robinson*). In *Robinson*, lawyer Harold Ruvoldt argued that because school financing in New Jersey was based on property taxes, it violated the state's constitution. Residents in wealthier districts spent a smaller portion of their income on school funding while still significantly outspending urban school districts. Ruvoldt maintained that this violated the *thorough and efficient clause* of the state constitution. In 1875, the New Jersey constitution had been amended to include this particular clause: "The Legislature shall provide for the maintenance and support of a thorough and efficient system of free public schools for the instruction of all the children in the state between the ages of five and eighteen years" (as cited in Yaffee, 2007, p. 30). In 1973, the New Jersey Supreme Court ruled that the system of funding public schools discriminated against poor urban districts.

Despite the court ruling and a 1975 Public School Education Act to provide state funding, lawmakers did not comply. In 1976, the Supreme Court shut down the public school system for 8 days, forcing the legislature to enact an income tax to fund the act. In 1981, the Education Law Center (ELC) joined the fight to reform the school funding formula in New Jersey. In *Abbott*, a class-action lawsuit, the ELC argued on behalf of 20 plaintiffs from 10 families in four districts that the 1975 Public School Education Act was not providing all students with a "thorough and efficient" education. They cited a "continued overreliance on local property taxes" (Yaffee, 2007, p. 99) and claimed that the funding shortages in poor districts caused the most needy students to have dilapidated school buildings, large class sizes, and underpaid, inexperienced teachers. Beginning in 1985, in a series of decisions (a "tortuous legal odyssey"; Yaffee, 2007, p. 4), the court gradually moved toward ordering and attaining funding parity for the Abbott Districts.

In the *Abbott II* decision, Chief Justice Wilentz maintained that if "thorough and efficient" applied only to basic skills, parents in the suburbs would stage a revolution when they learned that a basic education was all their children were entitled to receive. This decision created the original 28 (later 31 [ELC, 2013]) low-income, urban Abbott Districts.

After years of relentless perseverance, the *Abbott IV* decision in 1997 "ordered spending parity for urban districts and a detailed study of their programmatic needs" (Yaffee, 2007, p. 267). The ruling required that funding for urban Abbott Districts match the average of the I and J Districts (the districts in the state with the highest achievement). The court ruled that to meet this funding, the Abbott Districts had to spend only as much money as they could raise through a formula of property taxes and the state would pay the difference through income taxes. The 1997–1998 school year was the first time that spending was equalized between urban and suburban districts. In 1998, *Abbott V* ordered whole-school reform, supplemental programs, full-day kindergarten and preschool, and facilities construction for Abbott schools.

> The Abbott remedies were strikingly detailed and comprehensive. The mandates also broke new ground in school finance and education policy in the United States. No other state had equalized—or assured "parity"—in the education resources provided to children in its lowest-wealth communities at the level spent in more affluent ones. (ELC, 2013, para. 15)

In the years following these decisions, the case has returned to court numerous times in attempts to resolve disputes over financing, implementation, and other related issues. The 2008 School Funding and Reform Act

essentially replaced *Abbott*, and the districts, including Hoboken, are no longer technically Abbott Districts but are referred to as "former Abbott Districts" and still receive additional funds.

Alas, the fight continues. In 2011, the New Jersey Supreme Court found that the state's failure to fully fund the School Funding Reform Act of 2008 caused "instructionally consequential and significant" harm to at-risk students in districts across the state. The court also found that the harm to New Jersey schoolchildren from the funding cut was not a "minor infringement" on their right to a thorough and efficient education, but "a real substantial and consequential blow" to that right. In *Abbott XXI*, the court ordered that the formula be fully funded in Fiscal Year 2012 for students in the 31 high-need, urban districts.

Despite Hoboken's gentrification, which makes it the most expensive and gentrified of the 31 Abbott Districts, it is still considered, along with the others, a "former Abbott District." As such, it offers free preschool for 3- and 4-year-olds. Hoboken's status is seen by many, particularly those who do not support *Abbott*, as an indication of the problems with *Abbott* (Hu, 2007). However, despite Hoboken's current demographics, the district is still serving a majority of K-12 students in need. Hoboken's status as an Abbott District was never reevaluated and the legislature has not taken the lead in revoking the funding.

Abbott is an example of a policy that prevents full-scale neoliberal non-egalitarianism. If it is not undermined, the provision of public housing, combined with Abbott funding, can continue to provide opportunities for low-income youth by removing disparities in opportunity and exposure. In the next chapter, I explore these themes further by relating the school choice journey of two Hoboken children entering kindergarten and their families: Luis lives in public housing and Olivia lives in a luxury waterfront apartment overlooking Manhattan.

Chapter Three
Uneven Opportunities: Luis and Olivia*

Luis

Luis is four years old. He lives on the sixth floor in a high-rise public housing building in southwest Hoboken. The brick building looks much like the other brick buildings that surround it on the main public housing campus. Luis reaches his apartment by an elevator that all too often smells of urine.

His public housing development is aesthetically similar to "projects" across urban America. What is different about his home, compared to many public housing projects, is that his is surrounded by expensive apartments and condominiums; it sits in an upper-income gentrified small city. But for Luis's family, the area directly around his home is still considered unsafe. Luis's mother does not feel comfortable letting him or his older sibling play outside. She fears the influence of peers in the area directly around public housing. "I don't let them outside," she says.

Luis lives with his father, mother, and older half brother, James. Luis's mother's story mirrors that of many low-income families in urban America. She moved to Hoboken as a teenager and attended Mile Square High School (MSHS). Her family moved from a neighboring city into a subsidized housing development in Hoboken because her mother "wanted better for us." Her parents did not have college degrees. She is Puerto Rican and, like many other Puerto Ricans in Hoboken, she "went back and forth" between Puerto Rico and New Jersey. She described a post-high school process of navigating college and career that is reflective of many low-income students in urban America who do not have the economic capital, parental education, or educational background of their more advantaged peers.

> My plan was to go on to college. I was gonna go to a university. But, because of not knowing opportunities and loans, a month before I was supposed to go in they told me we had to pay a certain amount and I wasn't

> able to go. So I was 18, I wanted to get my own apartment, wound up going to a community college for half a year because I wanted to do Hotel Management . . . That was my dream because my aunt worked in tourism in Puerto Rico and that's what I saw. It was interesting to me. I did that for half a year, because we had to do culinary arts first, I wasn't too much into that, but it was a requirement, so I left. Then I went again to a different community college for like a semester and because I was traveling and living on my own, I couldn't afford it . . . Then I left to Puerto Rico and Florida for a year . . . I just lived with my cousin, I was just like whatever, I worked in a telemarketing place . . . and in the airport in Puerto Rico for about a year, applied for school, got in, got excited to come back to Jersey . . . I was gonna start school; got accepted over there, did financial aid and wound up going to one class maybe, and then I left. And then I came back and I went to [a private for-profit school], I got my diploma in Medical Billing and Coding, did that. I had financial aid and loans, which I literally, that was in 2006, I just finished paying off my loans. The only reason I paid it off was because they took it out of my taxes. I was like, "Just take it away, There's no way I can make payments, just take it away." And I finally, I'm in 0 [loan debt]. I wanted to go back to school but because I know I have to get loans, I said I'm not putting myself in that debt again. There's no way. I struggled for so many years wanting to pay this thing off. It killed my credit.

Luis's mother has been reliant on public assistance in various forms in the past. She said that when she became pregnant with Luis, "The only thing I knew to do, to take care of me and my being pregnant, and all these new situations in my life, was to go on welfare." Eventually, because "I needed Medicaid for them and insurance, those type of things, they put me in school again. Actually they told me, 'You need to go to [a] work program.' I'm like, 'No, can I go to school again?'"

At this point, she had found an interesting career opportunity and, with public assistance, obtained a certificate in the field, allowing her to obtain employment. "So it's brought me a lot of opportunities." In this way, she and Luis have benefited from the public safety net. She now works full time in a job she is clearly very proud of in a nearby town. She also babysits advantaged children in Hoboken and surrounding areas.

Luis's father is currently unable to work and is disabled with literacy issues. He is also Puerto Rican; he grew up in public housing in a nearby city. He did not finish high school. They moved from his home to New Jersey because, according to Luis's mother, she said, "I don't care, I want to go back to Hoboken . . . That's what I'm used to. It's better schools." Their annual family income was reported to be "not more than $25,000."

Luis's older half-brother, James, does not have a relationship with his mother, so Luis's mother is raising him with his father. James has special educational needs, has struggled significantly in school, and is in a special education classroom at the neighborhood elementary school. In this

elementary school, 96 percent of students are black or Latino and 97 percent qualify for free or reduced-price lunches. It has had the lowest test scores in the district.

James used to attend a different Hoboken district public school, which is increasingly popular with advantaged families. However, for his current grade level, he needed services that were offered only at this school. His stepmother, out of options, had to switch his school but is unhappy with the education that he is receiving there. She described "the worst year ever."

> I think I was in that school every week since September. Between the teacher . . . I don't think the teacher is capable of handling my son . . . I don't think a lot of the . . . teachers here in Hoboken understand the backgrounds of the children. If they were to sit there and really understand the child's life before, and why they have these disabilities, then maybe they'd be a little more compassionate.

She described a conversation with the principal wherein she threatened to remove James from the school:

> [I said] "Yes, I can, I can home school my son. It's not gonna be easy, but I probably can do a better job than your teacher, who keeps on basically harassing my child and making him feel uncomfortable." He didn't want to go to school. There's kids bullying him, throwing balls at his head. I go into school and they do nothing about it . . . It was just continuous things, like, it makes no sense. So I went in and he's writing things down. I was like, "You're writing things down? I've been here 10 times, what are you resolving? If I have to come in here again, I'm taking my son out of school and you can't stop me. You can't. Parents home school kids all the time." After that, it was a change.

Olivia

Just about a mile across town, about as far from Luis's home as one can go within the boundaries of Hoboken, is a luxury high-rise apartment building with views of the Manhattan skyline. Olivia, also four years old, lives on the sixth floor of this building. Her home is a spacious apartment owned by her family. Olivia reaches her home through a lobby, with a concierge who knows her family well; lobby amenities include soft lighting, couches, and paintings. Just outside of her building are retail establishments popular with advantaged residents. Like Luis, she takes the elevator to her sixth-floor home, but her elevator is pristine. Olivia's apartment is beautifully decorated, filled with toys and supplies to stimulate creativity. From a window in her home is a view of the outdoor rooftop pool in her complex.

Olivia's mother was born in Asia; her father is white. Her mother stays at home while running a small business about which she is passionate. Her father works in the FIRE (finance, insurance, real estate) industry in Manhattan. Olivia has a little sister, Ava, who will be in preschool next year. She currently attends a private early childhood program located in a very expensive part of Hoboken. Her mother reported the family income to be "either over $200,000 a year or over $500,000"; she is not exactly sure.

Olivia's family has lived in Hoboken for about seven years; they previously lived in New York City. Olivia's mother's story is one of attaining the elusive "American Dream." She grew up poor (although her parents possessed college degrees) and moved to the United States from a city in Asia while in high school. She excelled in her urban public high school and was top of the class, attending a selective college and obtaining an advanced degree. She describes herself as "very good at math." Olivia's father also possesses an advanced degree.

Uneven Education

Both Olivia and Luis have parents who care deeply about them and play active roles in their daily lives. I would describe both mothers as fighters—proactive in trying to provide opportunities for their children to give them the best possible future. This looks different because of the wealth, education, capital, and networks of the parents, but the intentions are the same.

Both Olivia and Luis attended public Abbott preschool programs for the past two years. This full-day public preschool program is available to all three- and four-year-olds in Hoboken because of the progressive *Abbott* legislation that created increased educational opportunities for low-income urban areas in New Jersey. Although the demographics of Hoboken have changed significantly, it still receives the funds for this program.

Both Luis and Olivia attended public preschool sites with a majority of advantaged students. Luis's mother made a choice, different from many in public housing, to send Luis to this particular preschool site rather than the neighborhood school where many of the public housing families send their children for *Abbott* preschool. As a result, she feels out of place when she goes to events for parents and seems to feel most comfortable with the one other parent whom she identities as also from public housing. She knew this school site was an option because she knew the provider from work that she has done in the community. Despite feeling out of place, she is happy with her decision and feels that this is an excellent opportunity for Luis. After school, Luis goes to the park to play or goes directly home, as after-school programs would cost additional money that the family does not have. Before Luis began preschool, he was home full time with

his father, as child care was not an affordable option and his father cannot work.

Olivia has attended a variety of education programs throughout Hoboken. At two years, she attended a structured program at an expensive center in town two days a week. When her mother was occupied with the second child, Olivia went to a full-day child care center three days a week because Olivia's sister was "very demanding as a baby. She didn't sleep." When Olivia was three years old, she entered the public preschool program. When it came time to choose a public preschool site, Olivia's mother, like Luis's mother, requested one that is popular with advantaged parents. Each day, Olivia stays for an hour of the after-school program for an additional fee. Olivia describes it as her favorite part of school. Her mother, like Luis's mother, is happy with the curriculum; she speaks fluently in "eduspeak" about the curriculum that her daughter will have next year and the pedagogical approaches used in the classroom. Before Olivia entered preschool, her mother attended a workshop on the curriculum and bought a book to learn more about it.

Next year, Olivia and Luis will both attend kindergarten in Hoboken. Like many advantaged parents in the community, Olivia's mother applied to the three charter schools in Hoboken, sight unseen, hoping that Olivia would be admitted. She learned about the schools through "word of mouth." She knew she wanted charter schools.

> I just heard they're good. I honestly don't 100 percent believe that they're better than the public schools but I thought I'd just take my chance and then I would do more due diligence once they do get in. I've heard things like the teachers aren't necessarily as credentialed as the public school teachers. I just think if there's a chance we stay here in the long run, I would like my kids to go to the charter schools up to fifth grade. And it's all part of the big picture of how things figure themselves out. If we got in we would stay longer. If we didn't we would move sooner.

Like many advantaged residents in Hoboken, Olivia's mother plans to move out of Hoboken eventually. Admission to a charter school could delay this move. She explained, "My biggest reason for sending my daughter to a charter school will be the makeup of the student body. I feel like it's more people like me." She did some research on the three charter schools and has an awareness of their themes and philosophies.

These charter schools in Hoboken were founded by, and are made up predominantly of, advantaged white families. Their test scores are generally higher than those in the district schools. Advantaged parents consider admission to these schools "the golden ticket" because they are regarded so highly and are public tuition-free schools (see chapter 5). Each school

has a specific theme that advantaged parents see as providing a rigorous learning experience. Olivia's mother was disappointed but not surprised when Olivia was wait-listed at all three schools; there are always extensive wait-lists. In fact, she says the high likelihood of being wait-listed was the main reason she did not visit these schools in advance because it would have raised her hopes.

> I don't think anyone really put much hope in it. And like I said, it's harder than getting into Harvard so people just feel . . . I think a lot of my friends are like if I got into a charter I would stay longer, if not we'll move by third grade, we'll move by second grade, whatever that happens to be. I don't think I know anyone who got in. I know a friend's friend got in. But I think it's just like something you [do]. At least for me, I didn't even do the research. I know people who did the research and like, went to the open house and they still didn't get in. I don't know if anybody puts all their hopes in that.

She has no confidence that Olivia will get off of the wait-list for the charter schools.

In a way that is indicative of the gamesmanship that goes into school choice for advantaged families and the way parents personally feel ownership of the educational experience, she explained why she had not applied to the private schools in town. "I worried that if I got in, I would have to go. If I say no to them, it might make them mad, so I would apply when I need it." However, she was comfortable in keeping Olivia in public district schools for a few more years, at least while her little sister takes part in the public Abbott preschool program.

Like many advantaged Hoboken families, the option of moving to the suburbs is ever present but she wants to take full advantage of the public preschool program first. When I asked when she would no longer be comfortable with district public schools, she responded,

> I hear fifth grade. I think you know it when you see it. I want my youngest to finish the preschools here, because it's so great and it's right here and it's all day, it's unbelievable. If I move to the suburbs now, I would lose all that to have her go back to like, three mornings a week. I think [it] would be hard for her and hard for me. The earliest we will move is when my younger daughter finishes.

She explained that their eventual move to the suburbs is inevitable because of her desire for the children to have a backyard. While the backyard is number one, the schools are "a very close number 2, if not tied." The suburbs that they are considering are tony, with reputations for excellent ranking public schools.

Olivia's mother requested that her daughter be placed in kindergarten at the same site she currently attends (where 72 percent of the students are white or Asian and 36 percent are economically disadvantaged). Just before our last meeting, she had received the letter saying that Olivia had been placed there, and she is happy about that. Prior to our meeting in June, Olivia had attended a kindergarten orientation, during which she went to the kindergarten classroom to do a project. Her mother, along with the other mothers, gathered to hear about the transition to kindergarten.

On the day I visited her home, Olivia excitedly ran to grab her kindergarten packet and, without any prompting, began to fill in page after page of patterns and letters. When she was stumped by a letter, she retrieved her letter guide from a different area of the home to complete the exercise independently.

Olivia's mother is worried that because Olivia is shy, it may be a difficult transition to kindergarten. But Olivia said that she is excited about kindergarten because "kindergartners don't have to nap."

When I arrived for my visit, Olivia's mother was very upset after a stressful day. She remarked that I would be interested in this because of my research. She had just learned that budget cuts in the district would influence the staffing in Olivia's classroom next year. She was very concerned about how this would influence her daughter's education.

She had been communicating with other families throughout the day about this. She mentioned that she is interested in fund-raising to finance more staff. "I'd do that, I'd be happy to fund raise to get that done." She noted that these cuts could result in her family moving to the suburbs sooner. When we are out in Hoboken later, she runs into another family and they discuss their concerns about this change. A group of affected advantaged parents quickly mobilized, discussing the issue on various forms of social media. They organized email writing campaigns to the school board, attended the school board meeting, and arranged a meeting with the superintendent. Within four days, this group had initiated a petition that garnered more than 100 signatures. They were ultimately able to use *Abbott* provisions to secure an outcome in their favor.

On the other side of Hoboken, Luis's mother assumed that she would be selecting a district public school for Luis for kindergarten next year. Hoboken has a district school choice policy (see chapter 4); parents are given a say in where their children will be placed if it can be accommodated (considering factors such as special educational needs, siblings in the schools, location). Knowing what she knows about the district schools, she planned to request a school farther away instead of the more conveniently located district school that many families from public housing attend. This preference makes Luis's mom an outlier from the other families whom

I interviewed in public housing who preferred their local neighborhood school, largely for reasons of comfort and convenience. Luis's mother appeared to have more middle-class networks and greater district school information than most HHA residents.

The enrollment in the school that Luis's mother wanted for him is 62 percent students who receive free or reduced-price lunches, versus the neighborhood school rate of 97 percent. It is also 33 percent white whereas the neighborhood school is 4 percent white. She was willing to figure out how to get him to a school much farther from home to avoid the neighborhood school where his brother goes. When I asked what she considered most important in choosing a school, she said, "The teacher's educational background, the school's program, and not so much location. What kind of kids go there." She described why she did not want the neighborhood school.

> [It] is next to the projects. The kids in the projects there, they're being raised in a certain way that my children are not. I'm raising like this, straight line. I know a lot of the parents are very carefree. The children tend to act a certain way than when they're more disciplined and controlled. And that was my fear with my stepson. That's why I knew that he would have the problems he has because he doesn't have those liberties.

Last November, she was simply planning to apply to what she saw as the best district school when an advantaged parent at Luis's preschool asked her if she had applied to the charter schools. "I was coming out of work, and she was passing by. She's gonna say hello to me and then she's like, 'Oh, did you apply to the charters?' I told her, 'No, you have to pay for them.'"

Luis's mother was shocked to learn that she was wrong and that these schools were options for her child.

> I went right online . . . I told my husband, "Do you know that I could have applied to charter schools?" He didn't even know what a charter school was anyway. He went to public school so, we didn't have that opportunity. So I was like, if my son can go to a charter school, which is better, why not? So then I went to the lady who I babysit and I'm like, "You could have told me Espagnol [a dual language charter school in Hoboken] was free." And then she starts laughing and I'm like, "It's not funny, you could have told me." She was like, "I didn't know that you wanted Luis in that school," because she knows my son.

Despite having an older child in the schools and the fact that she has been at these schools picking up other people's children as a babysitter for years, Luis's mother did not know that they were an option for her family. She was understandably very upset by this lack of information. She would not have applied to Espagnol had it not been for this conversation. When

we discussed why she assumed that these schools were private, her response was telling.

Luis's Mother: I had gone to Espagnol before, because I had picked up children from Espagnol. I know the ladies from Espagnol.
Interviewer: And you just assumed it cost money?
Luis's Mother: Yeah.
Interviewer: And what do you think made you think that?
Luis's Mother: White people. To be honest with you, not to offend you but, white people.
Interviewer: Trust me, you didn't. So that was why you just assumed…
Luis's Mother: There's all white kids. Do you see any black kids in there? No. I hadn't seen them. That's why I was like, "Well, The Hudson School or whatever; the other school is [two private schools in Hoboken]." Because Hoboken, it's like that. You don't see many children from down there; we don't have money like that. So when you go to these schools, all you see is the color of the skin.
Interviewer: So how long did you pick kids up there [charter schools when babysitting]?
Luis's Mother: Oh, every year. I would babysit kids I used to…where's the school on Washington Street…is it Dewey? It's the one right next to the church [refers to the two other charter schools]…Yes, I had picked up a lot that I used to take care of after school, and I would go right in and pick up the kids and there's some high-class people who are black who have money, but not many. Not here in Hoboken. It never crossed my mind. If I knew 4 years ago that I could have [applied to charters], I would have jumped on it.

After finding out that Espagnol was an option, she gave a few friends in public housing applications, and they also applied. She was excited about this charter school because she liked the idea that Luis would be in a dual-language (Spanish-English) environment. She was waiting anxiously to hear on the day of the lottery at Espagnol and was very disappointed when he was wait-listed. His number on the waiting list was so high that she had no hope that he would get in there next year. She was visibly disappointed.

However, Luis's mother plans to apply to all three charter schools for first grade and she selected the district school farther from home for kindergarten in the hope of avoiding the segregated neighborhood school. A month after I met with her for the first time, she sent me a message letting me know that the letter from the district had arrived saying that Luis had been placed at the neighborhood school and not the school she had requested. She called the board and spoke with someone who referred her to someone else. She had not heard back from that person when we last spoke, but she planned to go to the board in person to ask to be placed

on the transfer list. She was told that Luis was likely placed at the neighborhood school because his sibling goes there. This was upsetting for her because she does not want him there, and the sibling attends the school only because it is the only option, given his specific educational needs.

Her first remark when we met after she received the letter was, "I don't want him going there, he's the only one going there from his [pre]school." She said that all the other children in his preschool were going to other schools. "I started asking all the parents at his preschool, and they are like Elm, King, Roosevelt . . . he's the only one [going to the neighborhood school]."

Luis's mother pointed out disappointedly that his classmates had attended orientations for kindergarten at their schools (like the one Olivia and her mother attended), but the neighborhood school to which he was assigned has not had an orientation. With only three half days left in the school year, Luis would not get an orientation like Olivia's. But Luis's mother is a fighter. She planned to take him there herself on those half days to check out the kindergarten. We laughed together at the thought that the principal might be happy if her son were transferred because she is so often at the school, upset about situations involving her other son. Over the summer, she plans to have Luis prepare for kindergarten. "I have got him a bunch of books . . . he will work on his writing, his alphabet."

Uneven Cultivation

Olivia's mother is committed to providing her children the best possible experiences, educational and otherwise. Her children have attended drop-off classes, early childhood enrichment classes, day care and aftercare, even though she has a flexible schedule and is largely available. She said that if they attend Espagnol, she would be sure to take Spanish classes so she could learn Spanish along with them. Olivia started attending enrichment classes in Hoboken when she was about six months old. As her mother said, "We've done it all!" She has taken multiple music classes and at least four movement classes. She has participated in ballet, art, soccer, and gymnastics. Her mother recently hired a company to come to her home to teach Olivia and her friends. It is clear that her mother has put a great deal of thought into where Olivia's talents and interest lie and how to work on those. Her parenting style is a shining example of what Lareau (2003) called *concerted cultivation*.

Olivia told me excitedly about the summer camp she would be attending. She would take a bus from Hoboken each day to attend a summer camp for seven weeks, where she will swim and play. In the past, she has taken private swimming lessons from the lifeguards at the rooftop pool in

their complex. Olivia's little sister Ava will attend two half-day movement-based drop-off programs in Hoboken over the summer. They will also take a family vacation.

Lareau (2003) described children and families practicing concerted cultivation as often harried and tired, but this was not the feeling I got from Olivia's family during my visit. Olivia spoke excitedly about summer camp and about spending a day a week with her mom, hoping that they would "go out to lunch." Olivia's mother has time to exercise and organize her life while the children are at school. They have a luxury vehicle that makes getting around the city easier, and they have extended family nearby who can assist with child care. They have dinner together as a family each night.

When I observed Olivia's mother prepare to pick the children up at school, she filled ice water bottles for each of them and packed four snacks, two bottles of bubbles, sidewalk chalk, and a new soccer ball. When she picked up the children at school, she excitedly asked about their day in a characteristically middle-class parenting style: "How was your day?" She also asked specifically about pedagogical activities that are a part of the curriculum. "Did you do graphics practice?" She then took them to the park, where she actively engaged in soccer with them and drew on the sidewalk with them tracing their bodies; they blew bubbles together, and then they stopped at a fire truck and the firemen let the children climb in while mom snapped a photograph. They headed home after the children got wet in the park (against their mother's laid-back attempts to stop them). At home, they played while she made dinner. She speculated that, after dinner, they might go for a swim in the rooftop pool.

Olivia's mother speaks of opportunities that Olivia and Ava get, such as summer camp, that she did not experience in her youth. "I had no toys; we were so poor, we had no toys." She is happy that they have these opportunities and is aware of the broader picture. At one point when I mentioned work that I was doing in Newark, she thought for a moment and then commented that I must be rolling my eyes over the kindergarten staffing situation, given the challenges in the Newark schools. She is thoughtful, and at times critical, when considering the opportunities that she is providing her children. She is practicing concerted cultivation when she critiques her own parenting and goals as well. She mentioned a book that she was reading about privileged children and their sense of emptiness. She said that she wants to raise Olivia to be a happy person and, importantly, a good person. She said that Olivia wants to be a hairdresser, which is fine with her if it makes Olivia happy.

This family's economic capital and the safety net that it will provide for the children long term allows Olivia's mother to have some time for herself, to be thoughtful about her parenting, to choose activities that allow Olivia

to thrive, and to prioritize her daughter's happiness over even her future education or earnings potential.

Because of their financial situation, Olivia's parents eat out with the children a few times a week and without them once a month. They use babysitters found through a website a few times a month. As we walk down Washington Street, Olivia, unprompted, points out her favorite restaurant, one popular with advantaged residents.

While these aspects of childrearing may not seem of great educational importance, these opportunities allow Olivia's parents time together and strengthen family relationships. Eating out in middle-class establishments, for example, provides Olivia with cultural capital that she will carry with her through life. Her family does not experience the kind of allostatic load that poor families experience. They are not concerned about safety, about allowing their children to play outside; they have sufficient benefits and health care. Most important, perhaps, they have *choices*. They can stay in Hoboken or they can leave, they can consider private schools for the children, they can choose among activities that cultivate individual talents or purchasing new activities, and they can choose to move to a different school system. Olivia's story is one of true educational choices that influence the lives of children in ways that are obvious and in ways that are not.

Luis's mother, like Olivia's mother, wants the best opportunities for her child. When I asked her what she thinks Luis will be when he grows up, she said that she had not thought about this. When she asked him, he said, "I don't know." Then his mother replied, "Maybe a lawyer because he knows how to talk." She plans for Luis and his brother to go to college. "Yes! College, no question, he's going, his brother too . . . I haven't worked this hard for their education, I'll walk them in and sit with them." She pointed out that her opportunities in life were what she called "flat" because of finances. It is clear that, for this family, education must be the path out of a cycle of low-income subsistence.

Luis's mother is cognizant of many of the opportunities available in town but is also acutely aware of how unrealistic they are for her family due to finances. Her exposure to middle-class capital makes her aware of opportunities for other people's children and envious of these opportunities; she is not content to simply *facilitate natural growth* (Lareau, 2003). Day care was clearly not an option for Luis: "It's too much . . . $1,550 a month." But she was concerned that not having this experience put him at a disadvantage when he began preschool.

> He's doing well. I think he did have a little disadvantage not going to day care. Not so much social, but again it has to do with opportunity. If you can go to literacy classes, you can go to reading classes and all the other classes you're building vocabulary. He's very smart; he can talk like his mom.

She once looked into a literacy program in Hoboken that she had heard about from families she babysits.

> I tried to get my son into literacy class, it was like $400!…I babysat a little boy and I used to take him there and pick him up, and I'm like, "My son could benefit from this, let me see how much this is." I will keep him home and teach him, I will keep on fighting the good fight with my son, and it's just like, the opportunities that is for us down there [HHA], we don't get to see them.

She worries about Luis in school because of his brother's educational struggles and special educational needs and was disappointed that this literacy program was not a realistic option for him. She said that she often feels, as was the case with charter schools, that even when there are options available, she may be unaware of them because of the community and network in which she lives. She explained that a lack of accurate information led her to miss out on an athletic team opportunity for Luis. Yet she strives to provide opportunities for the family, about which she is excited. She got Luis involved in an affordable Lego class a few times. She cited the educational books and resources available to the children for whom she babysits and said that sometimes she purchases some of them for Luis after she sees them. She enrolled his older brother for soccer once, a sport that many advantaged families begin when their children are toddlers.

> *Luis's Mother*: I want to put him in so many programs. I put him in soccer and they made fun of him. He's a beginner; he's never done sports. The other kids were more advanced because they've been in sports and in soccer. Hoboken is all sports.
> *Interviewer*: How old was he when he did [soccer]?
> *Luis's Mother*: Fourth grade. I tried to put him, I said he needs some physical activity because of [his] behavioral health; they suggest that they be active. I paid for it through the Hoboken Alliance, $25. I had to get him a whole bunch of gear. He goes for one day. Social skills lack. He's not experienced like the other kids who have been in soccer since they were like 3…You know, and living in Hoboken is the pressure. Because it's like, I want my kids to be like that. But not like that. If you understand, like, I want them to have the same opportunities as all the other children, and every time I try to do that, it's like a block. It's like, why? Why is something always wrong?

Luis's mother said that she takes the children out to eat. "When I get paid, maybe every 2 weeks we go out, I take the kids out somewhere." They favor Johnny Rockets, IHop, and McDonalds. She does not use babysitters other than family. They had a family trip planned for summer. She said that Luis does not know how to swim, but she hoped that he would learn during the trip.

Luis's mother is clearly a very busy woman supporting her family financially, with few excess resources—something that undoubtedly contributes to allostatic load. She wakes up every day at 5:20 and is out of the house commuting to work by 6:20. During her commute she calls home to wake the family for school. She has no benefits or paid vacation and often chooses to work in the evening or weekends babysitting to make more money. Her job requires a good deal of energy. She also does all of the grocery shopping for the family and packs lunches for the children. At work she is required to take a one-hour unpaid lunch time, which she finds frustrating. There are physical and psychological stressors associated with poverty. It was clear from our conversations that the family has had at least one health concern that may have been exacerbated or not properly treated or dealt with because of their financial situation. She worries about her children's education.

Like Olivia's mother, she engages with her children frequently. This looks more like the working-class parenting style that Lareau (2003) described in *Unequal Childhoods* as facilitation of natural growth. While Olivia's mother lightheartedly and informally introduced me to her children as Miss Molly and the children immediately engaged me like an old friend, Luis's mother is careful to ask her children to look me in the eye, to respond to me, and to be polite. They are more shy and resistant in speaking with me. She regulates their behavior in the park from a nearby bench, telling them where to play with the water, and reprimands them if the water gets too close to us sitting nearby. "Push your brother on the swing. Go get wet! Act like kids! Don't bring water over here." Luis and his brother enjoy this sunny day in the park and are exceedingly well behaved; a member of their extended family comes to the park to see them and lovingly brings them a treat.

While this parenting style quite predictably fits more into Lareau's definition of the facilitation of natural growth than concerted cultivation, it is not by choice. This mother would love to provide the opportunities for her children that Olivia receives, but she does not have the choice. Despite living in a choice district and having the "option" of charter schools and district schools, ultimately where her children will attend school next year is not a choice for her, as they will probably both attend the segregated neighborhood school about which she has grave concerns.

The health and well-being of a family unit is inextricably tied to the health and well-being of the parents and the opportunities that are available to the children. While some parents have the opportunity to exercise, hire babysitters so they can go on "date nights," cultivate social networks, take the family out to eat regularly when they do not want to cook, and make choices about their children's extracurricular activities and schooling based on their preferences and the needs of their child, others do not have these options. Next year, although Olivia will not be at a charter school as

her mother would have liked, she will be in their first-choice district school and when they decide to move, they will have their choice of towns and school districts. These unequal opportunities lead to uneven cultivation of the child, through no fault of the parents.

Uneven Future Opportunities

Both of these children are fortunate to live in two-parent families with an employed wage earner and an extended family support network. Both children speak English as a first language. Both mothers are willing to go to great lengths for their children. Yet, research shows that the single strongest predictor of educational outcomes is a child's background, including socioeconomic status, parent educational attainment, and parental occupations. The wealthier the family, the higher the student's SAT scores are likely to be (Rampell, 2009). Research also shows that, as socioeconomic inequality has widened, so too has the socioeconomic achievement gap (Reardon, 2011).

Next year, while Luis and his brother are at the neighborhood school, Olivia and her brother will be in a different district school. Olivia's parents have the choice to wait to see whether they are admitted to a charter school in coming years, which will permit them a good deal of financial freedom while providing their children with what they see as a strong education. If this occurs, they, like many advantaged families, will feel that they have won the elusive Golden Ticket and will surely contribute greatly to the school in terms of social and economic capital. The money that they save by not attending a private school can then be used as they wish to advance the goals of the family. If she is not admitted, they will always have the option to relocate from Hoboken to a wealthy suburb. Private school is an option for them in middle and high school, regardless of current outcomes.

Luis's mother, like Olivia's, also talks about relocating. She does not want to stay in Hoboken public housing forever. However, she knows that if she leaves public housing, they will not be able to stay in the city because of the extent of gentrification in Hoboken. She does not mention the names of suburbs popular with families like Olivia's; instead, she mentions moving to a place such as Union City. Although Union City is a far less advantaged city economically, the school system is thriving and surpassing expectations for the student population (Kirp, 2013).

Although Luis and his family may benefit in a number of ways from living in a gentrified city, his education is not benefitting from the demographics of Hoboken. So for his particular situation, a move to Union City, a lower-income city, could actually prove educationally beneficial. Yet, ultimately, the choice to stay will likely not be in their hands, as Hoboken will not be an option if they have to leave HHA and lose the benefits of living

in a middle-class community. Luis's mother, like Olivia's, expects her child to go to college. The expectation is there, but there will be so many more obstacles in the way for Luis to overcome.

Complexity and Potential

These case studies highlight the complexity of this book. Luis's story is not one of a parent who does not care. Luis's mother tries incredibly hard to access the best possible educational opportunities within her knowledge and network. She conducts research and is willing to take a chance on what seems like the best option for her child. When she learned that charter schools were an option for Luis, she applied and told friends about this option as well. She sends Luis to a preschool that serves almost entirely advantaged children despite her discomfort around those parents. She requested a school farther from home for kindergarten when her son was wait-listed at the charter school. She volunteered at a charter school and has attended events for parents who are interested in improving the schools. As she said, her opportunities in life have been limited by her own economic, social, and cultural capital but clearly not by a culture of poverty or a lack of parental interest. However, her story is not the story of most of the public housing residents whom I interviewed. Unlike Luis's mother, most HHA residents never become aware that charter schools are an option for their children. Luis's mother's knowledge of district school choice and lack of interest in the neighborhood school differ from that of most of the public housing residents whose stories are told in the coming chapters and reflect her ability to conduct research and advocate for her children, as well as her exposure to middle-class capital.

Olivia's story also has complexity. While her parents are unwilling to consider the public schools in Hoboken for Olivia long term, their decisions are not without thought and experience. Olivia's mother freely and openly admits that the makeup of the student body is most important to her in choosing a school (just as Luis's mother did). She specifies that socioeconomics and what kind of friends her children will have are most important. "I don't care what race they are. Socioeconomics."

Olivia's mother attended a large urban public school and had an experience that she described as traumatic when she immigrated to the United States. "I remember it was very traumatizing. I would never want my daughter to be in that kind of environment in spite of curriculum, teachers, everything else."

> In [her city in Asia] it's very competitive, you can test in after sixth grade. I was not tested. I was sent up free. Like you're allowed to send one kid up

> free in the whole school and I was that kid. So it was a really, really good middle school and 95 percent of that school goes to college. Then I was yanked out at 15 as a freshman at high school, dropped off in an inner city high school in the United States. I imagined it to be all white people, but we had like 3 percent white people. It was Hispanic, black, Asian, all kinds of different Asians. It was very traumatizing. The first day of school I saw a kid with a 2-year-old, and I thought it was her sister . . . I'm surprised that I wasn't in a gang. I knew that was not what I wanted to do. Pregnant, or any of that.

She now is making choices for her children not based purely on speculations and stereotypes of race and class but on personal experience.

It is difficult to say what part of advantaged parents' decisions are based on factors such as race when the test scores align with the reputations and demographics of the schools. One can assume that advantaged parents do not want the school to which Luis has been assigned because the students there are low-income students of color. But when the numbers show lower test scores than the charter school that his mother wanted, these factors of influence on decisions cannot be disaggregated. It is hard, then, in good conscience, for anyone to fault these parents for choosing a school with better outcomes as measured by assessments.

Luis's mother also has concerns over the peer group he will have in school, and like Olivia's mother, she wishes to avoid him being in school with too many low-income children. There is evidence to support their concerns about peer effects (Hanushek et al., 2003).

There are no good mothers and bad mothers in this story. Both mothers are making decisions in the best interest of their children and family. Olivia's mother had social networks that informed her about charter schools early on, and she knew that she would apply. She is advocating for her daughter and the other kindergartners in her school to get the best possible resources. She is willing to expend energy, use her network, and (when allowed) expend her economic capital. However, it is clear that this is a slippery slope; her advocacy, and the advocacy of other parents like her, could (as is often the case) result in unequal opportunities for other people's children while children like hers reap the benefits. This is not a critique of Olivia's mother. She is not creating these systematic inequalities; she is merely an agent, looking out for her child's best interest within this structure.

These two stories demonstrate the potential for creating integrated middle-class schools in Hoboken. While Luis's mother did not know about the charter schools in advance, when she found out, she conducted research and applied to one that she thought would be a good fit. She also spread the word. There is no barrier preventing low-income parents from applying to and thereby diversifying charter schools. A lack of understandable

information about who can attend, a feeling of not belonging, a social network that does not access these schools, transportation concerns, the lottery system, and the small number of available spots act as barriers for these parents, not the pedagogy or the politics.

Also, as is evident from Olivia's story and the stories of many other advantaged children in Hoboken, these are not families who inherently believe in the superiority of private education. They want a public education, and many would like to stay in Hoboken. They also say that they value diversity. Now, whether or not these parents will ever be comfortable with the level of diversity and disadvantage in the district schools remains to be seen. But if the schools were more appealing to greater numbers of middle-class parents—reaching critical mass would likely shift overall perceptions and influence all of the young people in the city by shifting school demographics.

What is evident in these two stories are the great disparities in Hoboken that are reflective of disparities in society at large. Sassen (1991) posited a direct connection between globalization and polarization in Western cities. These families highlight this position, in that Luis's mother works in a low-paid job in the service of advantaged families and then for additional wages works by babysitting advantaged families in her time off. Olivia's family has enough wealth in the global FIRE industries for the mother to be comfortable spending time at home and with her small business while the family lives in a very expensive apartment.

In Hoboken, advantaged families and low-income families are not the only residents, but it can seem that way because the market-rate real estate is so expensive. Olivia's family and Luis's family represent extremes of the socioeconomic spectrum and many families are somewhere between. Many advantaged families maintain their lifestyle in Hoboken only by having two wage earners employed for long hours, commuting, and struggling with balancing child care; they may not be adequately represented by these examples. Also, many families in public housing prefer their neighborhood school and do not have the same opinions and exposure as Luis's mother. Yet there are vast disparities between these two families and between these populations and their social networks in Hoboken, and these disparities create barriers to opportunities that can be overcome only in unusual circumstances and with great intention.

Chapter Four
School Choice and Segregation in a Mile Squared

If you come from Washington [school], you are supposed to be a bad kid as well according the stereotypes in our school [MSHS], and Washington is a pretty bad school. When I went there, I felt like the teachers, they didn't really care and the students didn't really care. We had really, really bad teachers, especially math teachers. I remember that during seventh grade our math teacher left because she was pregnant and throughout the whole seventh grade we had substitute teachers, and all of them kept leaving because the kids were really, really bad. I remember this teacher that was from somewhere in Europe, the kids were throwing crayons at her and then she even started crying. I remember her walking out and I felt really bad. I don't know why they hated her. I guess because she wanted them to do work and stuff, and I guess the kids there never took it seriously. There was only a little group of us because none of the kids actually wanted to go to Washington. Like, I wished I went to King and the other schools that are in Hoboken. We were a pretty small group. (Youth participant, HHA resident)

Hoboken is a gentrified community with a majority of middle- to upper-class advantaged residents and an increasing number of families with school-age children (Palasciano, 2013a). Like many other cities with gentrification beginning in the 1970s, Hoboken experienced an influx of gentrifiers and later an increasing number of advantaged people remaining in the city after having children (DeSena, 2009; Hankins, 2007; Karsten, 2003). As such, Hoboken would be an ideal community for socioeconomic and, with it, racial school integration, which would benefit the low-income children of color in the community (Coleman, 1966; Rumberger, 2005) and the advantaged children, as well (Civil Rights Project, 2006; Mickelson, 2002; Wells et al, 2009).

Beginning with the Coleman Report in 1966, researchers have consistently found that "all children do better in middle-class schools" (Kahlenberg, 2006, p. 4), that is, schools in which there is a numerical majority of children from middle-class families. Nationally, there is a large

academic achievement gap between children from low-SES backgrounds and those from middle-class backgrounds. However, children from low-SES backgrounds who attend middle-class schools outperform students from middle-class backgrounds in low-SES schools (Kahlenberg, 2006). Race and class are strongly correlated, and racial segregation also has demonstrated detrimental effects on children of color. Racial segregation is the largest influence on the black/white achievement gap (Condron, 2009). There are few things that are agreed upon in education, but there *is* strong evidence and agreement that desegregation, when and where it has occurred, has narrowed the achievement gap.

Low-income children and children of color are not the only ones who benefit from attending desegregated schools. In today's globalized diverse world, advantaged children also benefit from experiencing life's diversity in the school. A statement to the Supreme Court for the *Parents Involved in Community Schools v. Seattle School District No. 1* and *Meredith v. Jefferson County Board of Education* (PICS) cases signed by 533 social scientists and researchers maintained the following: "Racially integrated schools prepare students to be effective citizens in our pluralistic society, further social cohesion, and reinforce democratic values. They promote cross-racial understanding, reduce prejudice, improve critical thinking skills and academic achievement, and enhance life opportunities for students of all races" (Civil Rights Project, 2006, p. 2).

Daniel Tatum (2003, p. 214) argued that in an "increasingly complex and pluralistic society," it is necessary to "interrupt patterns of social isolation" in education. Researchers have also found that both black and white students benefitted academically from desegregation (Mickelson, 2002).

Desegregation has had a positive influence on the achievement gap; however, despite this, in the 60 years since *Brown v Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* (*Brown*), policies and practices to create racial desegregation have fallen out of favor or have been overturned by the courts, allowing what progress was made to be reversed. In fact, because of the increasing resegregation of schools, the typical white student is enrolled in a school that is 80 percent white (even though they are only 60 percent of public school enrollment overall). "Almost 2.4 million students—including about one in six of both Black and Latino students—attend hypersegregated schools in which the student population is 99–100% of color" while white students remain the most segregated from other racial groups overall (Bhargava et al., 2008, p. 11).

This chapter investigates why the overwhelmingly middle-class demographics in Hoboken have failed to create socioeconomically integrated middle-class public schools. It analyzes who attends which district schools, why both advantaged and public housing parents select the schools that

they select, inequalities among district schools, the demographics and reputation of the public universal preschool program, and what can be done to improve the situation.

Intra-district School Choice

Hoboken is a "choice district," which means that parents can choose among the public elementary schools in town; placement is not based on residency. There are three district-run public elementary schools, three charter schools (discussed extensively in chapter 5), one district-run junior/senior high school, and one charter high school. There is also one school that serves only preschool students and kindergartners in the district. When parents register for the district-run public elementary schools, they designate which school they would like their children to attend. When there are more requests than places available, children are placed chronologically based on when the parents made the request. No school transportation is provided if parents choose a school that is not the most accessible one to them (however, the whole city measures just 1.28 square miles). According to one district advocate, giving parents a choice in which school their children will attend is "the district's way of saying, hey for personal convenience."

Just 11 percent of the Hoboken population lives below the poverty level and approximately 27.8 percent of school-age children (ages 5–17) live below poverty level (US Census Bureau, 2013). Although travel is sometimes inconvenient, all of the schools in Hoboken are accessible on foot or by public transportation. If the demographics of the district-run public schools even remotely reflected those of the community, the schools could be integrated middle-class schools. However, the reality is that the demographics of the district-run public schools do not match the racial or socioeconomic demographics of the community.

Who Attends Which District-Run Public Schools?

The three district-run public elementary schools serve a population that is majority minority and majority eligible for free/reduced-price lunches. Their standardized test scores are generally below the state average, with Washington exhibiting the lowest scores (State of New Jersey Department of Education, 2012–2013). Demographics for the Hoboken district-run public elementary schools and MSHS are presented in tables 4.1 and 4.2, respectively.

Washington, the school that is geographically closest to public housing, serves the highest proportion of free/reduced-price lunch students (97 percent), the highest percentage of black or Hispanic students (96 percent),

Table 4.1 Demographics of Hoboken district-run public elementary schools

School	*N (2012–2013)*	*Economically disadvantaged (2012–2013; in %)*	*Racial/ethnic background*[a] *(2012–2013; in %)*	*NJASK schoolwide performance math*[b] *(2012–2013; in %)*	*NJASK schoolwide performance LA*[b] *(2012–2013)*	*Chronic absenteeism (2012–2013; in %)*	*Faculty mobility (2010–2011; in %)*
King School (King)	583	62	Black: 11; Hispanic: 52; white: 33; Asian: 5	59	54	9	11
Roosevelt School (Roosevelt)	127	60	Black: 9; Hispanic: 51; white: 35; Asian: 5	66	66	1	5
Washington School (Washington)	256	97	Black: 32; Hispanic: 63; white: 4; Asian: 0	43	28	15	15

Notes: NJASK: New Jersey Assessment of Skills and Knowledge; LA: Language Arts; Math: Mathematics.

Source: *School Report Cards*, by State of New Jersey Department of Education (2010–2011), retrieved from http://www.nj.gov/education/data/; and New Jersey Performance Report, by State of New Jersey Department of Education (2012–2013), retrieved from http://education.state.nj.us/pr/.

The school that serves only preschool and kindergarten, Elm, is 72% white/Asian and 36% economically disadvantaged.

[a] Selected categories, percentages do not equal 100.

[b] Schoolwide performance on the NJASK, percent scoring proficient or above.

Table 4.2 Demographics of Mile Square High School

School	*N (2012–2013)*	*Economically disadvantaged (2012–2013; in %)*	*Students with disabilities (2012–2013; in %)*	*Racial/ethnic background*[a] *(2012–2013; in %)*	*Student suspensions (2012–2013; in %)*	*HSPA (2012–2013; in %)*	*Graduated with both parts of HSPA (2012–2013; in %)*	*Average SAT scores (2012–2013)*
Mile Square High School	592	81	14	Black or Hispanic: 84; white or Asian: 16	18.4	Proficient and above (LA): 87; proficient and above (Math): 62	60.5	402 Math 403 Critical reading 385 Writing

Notes: HSPA: High School Proficiency Assessment; NJASK: New Jersey Assessment of Skills and Knowledge; LA: Language Arts; Math: Mathematics.

Source: *School Report Cards*, by State of New Jersey Department of Education (2010–2011), retrieved from http://www.nj.gov/education/data/.

[a] Selected categories, percentages do not equal 100.

and the lowest proportion of white students (4 percent). Washington is deemed unacceptable by advantaged parents and is segregated; the other two schools[1] as well as Elm, which has only early childhood, are experiencing a degree of "tipping in" by advantaged children, as shown in table 4.1. Stillman (2012, p. 11) defined *tipping in* as "the process of school integration in a gentrifying neighborhood through the compounding choices of many gentry parents." According to Stillman's (2011, p. 30) three stages of tipping in, King is at "Stage 2 Integration: A changing school—a solid, stable presence of gentry children enrolled in the early grades who have GPs [gentry parents] that are very active in outreach to other neighborhood GPs."

Hoboken is already a gentrified community, not a gentrifying community, and this research indicates that many of the advantaged parents deem no public schools in Hoboken to be acceptable options, particularly not for the middle school and high school grades. A small group of white residents ardently support the public school system; some are born-and-raised Hobokenites, some are advantaged, and a majority appear to be early wave gentrifiers. These men and women speak at Board of Education meetings, serve on the Board of Education, write letters to the editor, and post on the Internet about the positive experiences of their white children at MSHS or the other district schools.

These parents vehemently oppose the public perception of these schools. Yet, during data collection, I did not meet one white advantaged parent with school-age children who had not applied to a charter school at some point and who did not express concern about their educational choices when their children reach middle school and/or high school.[2] A realtor said, "I don't know anyone who is not born and raised in Hoboken who has sent their kids to the public high school here, of all the families I deal with." A comment on a public local parenting website in answer to a question about navigating the Hoboken schools gives insight into the opinions of most advantaged parents. "Over the last few years, things have gotten a little better for the younger ages. After about 10 y/o, going to public school in Hoboken is not for parents who wants [sic] to ensure their kids don't slip through the cracks" (Hoboken Mommies 24/7, 2012, para. 4). One parent explained why she is so conflicted about Hoboken.

> I love it because of the diversity and the social nature of the town. I think that if we moved to the suburbs, it would be a real challenging transition to be so isolated. We'd have to be proactive in making play dates; that sounds really stressful. But being able to just hop into a park any time, any day, and running into your friends, it's a dream. But you know, the schools are—it's a daunting challenge that we're facing.

Even advantaged parents who are now supporters of the district-run public school King sheepishly admitted having applied to, or planning to continue to apply annually to, charter school lotteries. The mayor, who is aligned with the school board slate that is seen by many charter school advocates as "anti-charter school," sends her children to Hoboken's Dewey Charter School, and a Board of Education member aligned with the same slate was a founder of Dewey Charter School.

Despite the presence of other choices, low-income public housing residents overwhelmingly choose district-run public schools for their children. Within the district, they make different choices from advantaged parents. Given the option to send their children to more racially and socioeconomically integrated and higher-performing (as measured by standardized tests) district-run schools (King and Roosevelt), most HHA residents choose their local school: Washington. In interviews with HHA parents of children in district elementary schools, all but one had children enrolled at Washington. One parent explained that her child had to attend King because of his special education needs; when that was no longer required, she moved him back to Washington. Another mother said that her sister works at King, and she herself used to work there, but she still chose Washington for her children because the most important thing was "being close, because that way I could keep an eye on them." The one HHA resident who did not choose Washington chose King; when asked why, she explained, "I just feel like they would get a better education being away from the projects."

Yet even King does not represent the demographics of the community. There are several reasons the demographics of the district-run public schools do not match those of the middle-class community: the choices of parents in public housing, the economic capital of the community that allows advantaged residents to choose options other than the public schools or to move away from Hoboken, the reputation of the district-run public schools, and the perception of the administration of the public schools. Neoliberal school choice policies in Hoboken have allowed school gentrification to be grossly uneven, which has resulted in segregation.

School Choice Decisions by Parents in Public Housing

When given a choice, parents from both groups, HHA and advantaged parents, are self-selecting different options. Unlike Luis's mother, who wanted to avoid Washington, responses from most HHA residents about choosing Washington for their children came down to issues of location, appreciation of the neighborhood school, a desire for their children to fit in, and discipline and administration.

When asked why they chose Washington, HHA parents most frequently cited location and that because of the location, they (or their neighbors) could keep an eye on their children. Convenience is a serious consideration for families, when grandparents or busy or overburdened parents have to pick up children and drop them off at school. This also speaks to the idea that choice is not really choice if it is not a feasible option for families. When asked why her grandson is at Washington, one participant stated, "Because it was closer to Grandma to drop him off and pick him up and help Mama out." The mother whose child attended King for special education switched him back to Washington when he no longer required the special services because "there was no bus, and I wasn't able to walk to King, so he's here." King is about 0.93 mile from Hoboken Housing, while Washington is about 0.21 mile. Many of these parents have to contend with children of different ages, and a long commute to school can be a burden, especially in the winter (Palasciano, 2013b).

The majority of mothers from the HHA who were interviewed had grown up there, and many had attended Washington; they saw Washington as a neighborhood institution. Some even said, "I want them to go where I went." Their HHA community is one, I was told, in which the residents look out for each other and trust one another, but not necessarily outsiders. This means that attending the school closest to home gives parents a sense of safety and security. At this school, HHA parents have a good deal of social capital.

Issues of discipline came up repeatedly in the interviews, with HHA parents reporting either that they took children out of Washington because of discipline issues or that they were happy with the strict discipline at Washington.

Interviewer: Are you happy with Washington?
Participant: Yes.
Interviewer: What do you like about it?
Participant: The teachers—there's new teachers, there's a new principal, so things are more strict.

A father from Washington expressed satisfaction with the discipline now but had been unhappy with the prior school administration.

Interviewer: Are you happy with Washington?
Participant: Not really.
Interviewer: No? How come?
Participant: It's just like, the kids and the school. Right now they have a new principal but he's good. I like the way he's working out because last year was a total disaster. But this year I think he's got it on point.

An HHA mother explained, "I haven't had any problems, she's adjusted very well, and they have a new principal. He's fair but stern. And so I haven't had an issue."

Other parents also concerned with discipline expressed *displeasure* with Washington. A public housing resident employed in a school system expressed dissatisfaction with discipline at Washington.

> *Interviewer*: Now, what did you like about Washington, why did you want your kids at Washington?
> *Participant*: At first, I liked the convenience because it was so close, and that was about it. Then, I didn't like it any longer, so I personally took my kids to King School.
> *Interviewer*: So you opted for King, you made that your first choice and they got in?
> *Participant*: Yes.
> *Interviewer*: And what did you like better about King?
> *Participant*: I liked the structure and the discipline.

Another HHA parent said that she had requested that her child be transferred out of Washington after a student with special educational needs had sprayed Lysol® in her child's eye. She added that there were "distractions in the learning environment in first grade." She noted, "I said, 'Look, I don't want my kid in this school.' There was the physical harm, but also the distractions." Another parent mentioned issues with bullying that she did not think were always handled appropriately.

While advantaged parents are concerned with how involved they will be allowed to be in their children's school, this was not mentioned in any interviews with HHA residents. One HHA resident explained that she wished that she heard less frequently from her son's school and was less involved. Her son was in special education at Washington, and she felt that the teacher was too reliant on her.

> With my son I've been visiting too much . . . One Special Ed teacher [at another school] told me that, if they call you too much, try to tell them to do their job, because sometimes they are supposed to work with the kid before calling you. Not just because he breathes bad and they want him to breathe this way you have to go there.

When the communications that a parent has with his or her child's school are solely negative, it is easy to see how parents would see working with the school and parental involvement in a negative light rather than a positive light. Luis's mother described how she heard from his brother's school frequently, but it was always to tell her something negative, which was upsetting.

When asked whether they were happy with Washington, HHA parents' responses ranged from a simple "yes" to "for the most part" and "not really," with no parents saying effusively that they "loved it" (a very common response from interviewed charter school parents). One new parent who lives in the HHA speculated about where she would send her children: "I'll send them to Washington. It's a pretty good school." Often, these parents expressed a belief that what happens in the home is more important than what happens at school. One HHA mother reflected on Washington: "Unfortunately, it's not a good reputation, but I believe that everything starts at home." When asked about raising children in Hoboken, another HHA mother said, "That goes on the family, too. It's not Hoboken, it's how the family works, too."

Social capital and opinions on discipline factor into these decisions but convenience is a very strong factor, negating the underlying idea of neoliberal school choice and showing how neoliberal nonegalitarianism so often unevenly benefits the advantaged under the guise of creating choice for all. Yet the community's desire for a convenient neighborhood school should not be overlooked or undermined and is something that is seen elsewhere. In cities such as Newark, Washington, Philadelphia, New York, and Chicago, the closing of neighborhood schools has caused great anger among residents who value their neighborhood schools in spite of their reputations or test scores (Zubrzycki, 2012).

Advantaged Parents' Views on District-Run Public Schools and Opting Out

To understand the educational experiences of public housing residents in a gentrified community, it is necessary to examine the educational choices and experiences of advantaged children. Most important to advantaged parents when making school decisions is the reputation of the school and whether their children will fit in, given that reputation.

The public schools, particularly at the middle and high school levels, have a reputation among white middle-class residents for serving low-income children of color exclusively. As one advantaged parent put it, "The kids that go to the high school are only the kids from the Housing Authority."

Word of mouth and test scores are the two ways that most advantaged parents draw conclusions about the district-run public schools. "I hear horror stories about the high school and that the bar's not high, a lot of bad things . . . education may not be that big of a priority at home." An African American mother, born and raised in Hoboken, whose children are in a private school said, "I wish there was a coalition of parents who would band together for a good middle school. Then I would not have my kids at

a private school." Another parent joked knowingly, "I know what you hear on the playground: If you don't get into a private school or charter, your child is doomed for life."

Advantaged parents do not consider Washington for their children. Some advantaged parents were open to the idea of sending their child to King until about fourth grade but expressed deep reservations about the quality of public schools beyond fourth or fifth grade. For high school, advantaged parents who want to remain in Hoboken see county public schools with selective admissions policies as the best option if they do not want to send their children to private schools. One father said, "If you do not want to pay tuition, you have to work your tail off and get into a school [such as High Tech or another selective public school]." He explained his family's situation: "We'd much rather stay [in Hoboken], and that's why we bought a three-bedroom. But the whole high school thing is scary, so we don't know." Charter school students seem to favor selective schools such as the public school High Tech or the private Hudson School. A list from Dewey Charter School of high school acceptances for school year 2011–2012 (which it said was still in flux/incomplete when compiled) showed no students attending MSHS (although there had been four the year before), ten students were accepted at High Tech (a county school), four at The Hudson School (a private school), six at St. Peter's Prep, and three at St. Dominic. Small numbers of students (one or two) selected a variety of other schools. An advantaged woman who is a charter school teacher in Hoboken and resident of Hoboken said of MSHS,

> It should be one of the top high schools in New Jersey because we have this population of college-educated, swanky, Armani-wearing people who get on the PATH train every day and go to Wall Street. And it's true, right? I mean, it makes no sense to me that we should live in this affluent neighborhood and have the worst high school in the state of New Jersey. I don't get it. It's concerning to me as a taxpayer, as a teacher, and just as a resident.

Advantaged parents hear rumors about the public schools, particularly the high school, and have limited experience with the schools on which to base their opinions. One charter school parent explained,

> Unfortunately, the high school has several bad apples. We have a friend that did a speech over there. He said that while he was speaking, they were cursing, they weren't paying attention, they were fighting, they were doing all this other stuff. And you've got to imagine that, if you're a teacher, day in and day out, of someone ignoring you, eventually you give up on the kids. And then it snowballs out of control. And then you become 280-something on the list [referring to MSHS's ranking in *New Jersey Monthly*].

Advantaged parents were not comfortable with their limited experiences with the district-run high school. A mother and father of children in the charter schools described an event that took place after a meeting designed to persuade advantaged parents from the charter schools to send their children to MSHS. This story demonstrates the disconnect that advantaged parents and their children feel with the public school option.

Mother: We had just had that meeting about the high school and were like, "OK, that's great. We won't put it [MSHS] completely off the list." So then the basketball teacher took them up there to watch a basketball game, and then a massive fight broke out where somebody bit another girl! And she came back going, "I will never go to that school!" That's scary for an 11-year-old to see.

Father: She was 10 at the time. And I had just come home from this meeting. I really drank the Kool-Aid that night. I was like, "Oh, it'll be great. Don't worry about it. We'll go for the others [selective schools] and if we can't [and have to do MSHS], it'll be fine." There was someone from the Science program, the guy from Social Studies, the lady from English, the principal…

Mother: I feel bad. It is sad that they can't get it together.

This mother also explained that her experiences in living very close to Washington had made her uncomfortable with the elementary school; she had never considered it for her children. "From being next to it [Washington] anyway, just the language. I don't want to walk my children to school through that atmosphere, either. And just from other people [who] would say that they'd been in the classes and it's just not nice. Not where you'd want to picture your small children going to school every day."

It is also evident that, among families that stay in Hoboken when the children are in school, the parents frequently opt for options other than the district public schools. Charter schools are a popular option. There are private schools in Hoboken, and some parents send children "across the river" to New York City or to private schools in Jersey City. Parents engage in frequent conversations about how to "get into" private schools in town. A number of parents with whom I spoke considered private preschool in spite of the free public preschool in order to increase their chance of obtaining a spot in the private school for elementary school. One mother had gone back to work after removing her child from King because she had been unhappy with the school and needed extra income to cover the cost of private school tuition.

Of the K-12 students in Hoboken, 23 percent attend private schools (US.Census Bureau, 2013). As a point of comparison, Newark, another former Abbott District that is demographically very different and more low-income than Hoboken, has an opt-out rate of 8 percent. Montclair,

cited by a local realtor as one of the places to which Hoboken advantaged families frequently move, has an opt-out rate of 12 percent. Hoboken has a higher opt-out rate than both of these places—one a lower-income city and one a wealthy suburb. Hoboken also has a higher opt-out rate than neighboring New York City (US Census Bureau, 2013).

Many don't just opt out of the Hoboken district schools; they eventually opt out of Hoboken altogether. While it is difficult to identify the precise reasons advantaged families choose to move out of Hoboken—a desire to raise their children in suburbia, more space, the stresses of urban parenting, the dearth of three-plus bedroom homes in Hoboken, a yard, parking issues, and so forth—the school system is a contributing factor for many. I asked a mother who was deciding whether to move now or in a few years whether she would ever consider staying, and the first reason she cited for not even considering staying was the schools. The parents with whom I spoke who had children who were not yet two years old frequently asked each other, "When will you move?" and "Where?" A local realty group even hosts monthly "Hoboken to the Burbs" seminars. The advantaged families that choose to stay indefinitely are the exception rather than the rule. Two advantaged parents of young children reflected:

> *Participant 1*: Of the families I knew who went to King who [had children who] were in my daughter's class, like half of her class is not back for first grade.
> *Participant 2*: There definitely seems to be a lot more exodus than I anticipated.
> *Interviewer*: And most of those go to charter schools?
> *Participant 1*: Charter, charter, private, charter, suburbs, suburbs.
> *Participant 2 (to Participant 1)*: You're almost the only family left that I'd known before we went.

One of these participants offered to provide a list of friends who had moved out of Hoboken because of the schools.

The fact that many families leave Hoboken when their children reach school age is evident in the 2010 Census and American Community Survey data, which show a clear difference between the number of children under 5 and those over 5 in Hoboken, and the number continues to decrease among older youth. Children under 5 make up 6.8 percent of Hoboken's population, children 5–9 years old 2.7 percent, children 10–14 years old 1.7 percent, and children 15–17 years old just 1.1 percent (US Census Bureau, 2010).

There is a dip in the populations at the ages when students start elementary school and then again around fifth grade. I heard repeatedly that families are somewhat comfortable with the schools until middle school. Some advantaged mothers told me that it is "not the end of the world" if

their children have to go to King for a few years, but they plan to take their children out after elementary school to send them to the prestigious private Hudson School for middle school. Parents also sometimes choose to move to the suburbs when their children are little because they want to start their children in a school system with which they are comfortable through high school.

School Choice Decisions by Advantaged Parents

I found that advantaged parents, like those in public housing, make decisions based on reputation and what they think will be the best "fit" for their children, which usually means having a majority of students and families like theirs in the school (Holme, 2002; Johnson & Shapiro, 2003; Roda & Wells, 2013). In addition, advantaged parents look carefully at parent involvement, curriculum/pedagogy, and test scores and less closely at issues of convenience and discipline. For these parents, however, choice actually feels like a choice, unlike for those in HHA who may be constrained by convenience and an inability to relocate. It is not a surprise that convenience is less of a pressing concern for advantaged families than it is for HHA residents, since many advantaged families have the economic capital to own cars or to afford other means of transportation. Advantaged residents are also more likely to have job flexibility that allows them to coordinate getting children to and from school, or they can hire babysitters to assist with drop-off and pick-up. One parent detailed how she was able to send her child to a charter school on the other side of town because she hired a babysitter to come every day to be with her younger child who napped while she picked up her older child at her charter school.

When looking at issues of their children "fitting in," they see all of Hoboken, excluding the area around public housing and Washington, as a place where their children will fit in. One charter school parent explained her decision not to request Washington even though it was two blocks from her home: "I didn't want to go obviously to Washington because I obviously didn't hear great things about it."

In terms of school choice among the district-run schools, test scores weigh on the minds of advantaged residents. As Weininger (2014, p. 291) found in his research, "Advice and opinions received through the network are often combined with standardized test scores, local reputational knowledge, and firsthand experience of schools." One foreign-born Asian parent who had recently moved to Hoboken and lived next to Washington explained her decision to request Roosevelt: "Yes, first choice because of the rating for the school, and the second choice is King. We couldn't get the first one, so it was King." Weininger (2014) also reported that middle-class residents with less of a local social network found test score metrics

of particular importance. Such as was the case with this family, who was foreign born and new to Hoboken.

During data collection, *New Jersey Monthly*'s rankings of New Jersey high schools were published, and MSHS was ranked 298 out of 328 schools, compared to 187 in 2010 (Schlager & Staab, 2012).[3] Several advantaged participants mentioned this as evidence that their options were not improving. Also, in the *Wall Street Journal*'s online real estate news and development section, an article entitled "Biggest Back-to-School Purchase: A New Home" named the Hoboken schools number one among "America's least attractive school districts"[4] (Whelan & Chen, 2012). This type of negative press based on standardized test scores and measures of families with school-age children relocating does not help the district public-school "brand" for the advantaged. A parent of charter school students said about MSHS, "I was just on a website today that was talking about the high school, and I saw the ranking of the high school. It went from 178 to like, 287 over the past 2 years. So right now, from elementary school to middle school, I feel really comfortable with it [staying in Hoboken], but after that I don't." This reflects the influences of reforms such as No Child Left Behind (NCLB) that have increased the focus on test scores.

Advantaged parents may be basing their decisions in part on flawed quantitative measures that only serve to solidify opinions that they already held based on preconceived notions of schools with these demographics. Neoliberal reforms that push a focus on test scores show quantitatively what these schools look like overall; qualitatively, there are different descriptions from parents who have actually accessed them. So while the test scores overall do not look impressive for MSHS, the in-school experiences of advantaged students that I heard about were all positive. One district advocate described this disconnect:

> I will be happier when there is more buy-in of public school districts and the high school is not seen as some scary place where my poor daughter is going to get attacked or something. It just is not true. And I don't know why anybody would continue to say that. Just go to the school, check it out. It's a lovely, peaceful place.

This district advocate noted that perception without firsthand experience can be flawed, "Someone said [to me], 'Maybe the earlier grades are okay but the high school, there's no way! That school is so violent they have an ambulance parked right out in front of the building.' Well, that was for the EMT program, idiot." An article in the *Hudson Reporter* paints a different vision of the high school than public perception would lead one to believe. It details the valedictorian and salutatorian of the high school, who are

white and Asian and will attend Bucknell University and the University of California at Berkeley.

> Outside the theater, Markevitch distinguished herself as president of the Math Club, layout designer for the yearbook, and a soccer player . . . She was also an editor for the literary magazine Create and enjoys writing alliterative poetry. Yoon-Hendricks has built her own impressive resume over four years at [Mile Square] High School. Like Markevitch, she was active in the Drama Club, acting in musical theater productions and garnering second place for her comedic monologue at the Thespian Festival. In addition, she played volleyball, led the Student Council, and served as editor- In-chief of the high school newspaper. (Davis, 2014, para. 6)

The article also details their involvement in the National Honor Society, writing for a teenage sexual health magazine, and participating in Harvard Model Congress.

The neoliberal focus on test scores does not take into account other aspects of education such as the possibilities for a diverse social network and expansive extracurricular activities. This laser focus on measures of student outcomes can exacerbate inequality between schools by keeping away certain students, undermining the potential for creation of socioeconomically integrated schools that, if they were created, could stand to benefit low-income students without other choices.

Curriculum is another concern when advantaged parents choose among schools. One advantaged mother identified elements that were most important to her when making school choices: "I'm more of a proponent of curriculum." Parents who choose charter schools over district-run public schools report the specialized focus and rigorous curriculum as a reason for the choice. It does not seem to be a *specific* curriculum or pedagogical style that appeals to them, since most choose to apply to three very different charter schools, and often private schools as well. Rather, the idea that their child will get something extra or sought after or rigorous appeals to them. One charter school founder explained of Espagnol: "The thing is, if you look up bilingual schools, other than the dual-language charter schools that have recently been started, people pay through the nose for language immersion education; I mean the Lycée Français, for example, costs a fortune." An administrator at another school said, "Your child will be receiving a *premier* education that elsewhere would cost between $35,000 and $60,000." A charter leader involved with Dewey Charter School explained, "Well, this school is kind of unique. It bills itself quite accurately as a progressive charter school. It had a vision of itself addressing the whole child, where it looks at children individually. It addresses individual strengths and needs of children."

In this age of education policy reforms that rely heavily on test scores, private schools and charter schools in Hoboken also seem to offer advantaged parents a more well-rounded education without reliance on the dreaded "teaching to the test." Charter schools have more flexibility to do this because their students generally enter the classroom better prepared to succeed on standardized tests because of their socioeconomic backgrounds. As one charter advocate reflected on the school's success in test scores, "They better be good, given the students we have." While these schools are not immune to the pressures of test score accountability, and one founder admitted that this pressure has undermined their original strict adherence to a progressive philosophy, they are still able to supplement the rigors of test preparation through innovative electives, extracurricular activities, class trips, and students whose backgrounds inevitably boost overall test scores. In this way, neoliberal accountability reforms are inadvertently influencing those without choice, from low-income backgrounds, by pushing out those with choice.

The other issue that advantaged parents consider heavily when choosing a school is parental involvement; that is, *how they can be involved*. They want to give their children every possible benefit and privilege, and they want to be involved with the school and teachers. One advantaged interviewee with children in a charter school explained, "I think people just want to be more involved in their kids' lives." This is a privilege that lower-income families may not enjoy because of a lack of work flexibility, the need to work for hourly pay, or a lack of comfort in this type of role in an institution.

Advantaged parents are frequently dissuaded by what they see as an inability of the public schools to appreciate and utilize their social and cultural capital. I heard repeatedly that parents did not feel that King welcomed parental involvement. In my interviews with advantaged parents whose children attended or had attended King, I heard about lack of outreach to parents, inconvenient or nonexistent PTA meetings, "secret" parent leadership clubs, and cliques that run the school and leave new advantaged parents feeling left out and unappreciated. One advantaged mother of a student at King said, "There was no PTA meeting until November!" and another said, "I signed up and I wanted to volunteer and be a class parent, and I got nothing…I even went to the office; I said, 'What's the schedule of the PTA meetings?' She said, 'We don't have PTA meetings.'" Mothers in the community frequently discussed the lack of information from the public schools, as well.

Many participants in the study described the district public school administration as unwilling or unable to address adequately (in the minds of the parent) the perceived special talents of their children when those talents were brought to their attention.

Interviewer: Was she tested gifted in the district?
Participant: Oh no, they don't test you. I [got her] tested. Which I knew. I didn't have to get her tested because I cared but because I was like, "What can I do to advocate for my kid?"

This parent and others reported that there were, in their opinion, insufficient programs for gifted and talented students in the district. Parents with children as young as preschool expressed an interest in gifted and talented pull-out programs. Advantaged parents told me that their children were bored and that they had to send them to private school, or if they had not started school yet, they were afraid that their children would be bored. This need seemed to disappear or not be a concern if the children were able to attend charter schools.

Other advantaged parents who were critical of the school system said that it has not adapted to demographic changes and still treats parents as if it were a "poor district." Frequently, there is a disconnect between the way advantaged families expect to be treated and the established school culture of the district-run public schools. For example, in an interview with two advantaged mothers, one said that in the district-run public school that her child attends, "the security guard alone could scare you." The other parent described her daughter's first day at King:

> After the first day I dropped her off at Kindergarten, I came out practically crying, and it wasn't because I was sad to leave her at Kindergarten. She had been going to full-day preschool for two years. It was because I didn't feel happy with where I'd left her. There was chaos, people were yelling. I've seen teachers screaming in the hallways there. That's not the atmosphere I want my child to be in. It shouldn't be acceptable.

This is not a disconnect only in Hoboken. Stillman (2012, p. 73) described it as "the unbearable school norm of 'yelling' adults" and described how advantaged parents in New York City leave schools "in droves" if they see this occurring. Advantaged parents feel entitled to a respectful school culture that includes extensively involving parents and not yelling, and they do not feel that they are getting this in the Hoboken district.

Advantaged parents whom I interviewed claimed to value diversity. They were members of what Florida (2010) named the creative class and had what Stillman (2012, p. 8) called a "gentry mindset," that is, they are "complex, progressive people, inclined to embrace diversity as part of their identity." These are people who could opt for the suburbs as soon as they have children (and many do), but those who stay expressed to me that they like that Hoboken has more diversity than the suburbs in which they were raised. They tend to be well educated and politically correct. One mother whom I interviewed in her brownstone referred to the public housing projects as

"the P word." When parents on the online mothers' group write discussion posts that are perceived to be racist or classist (usually with respect to the public schools or parks that are frequented by children from public housing), the majority of the public responses from other members of the group express disgust with that position.

However, in Hoboken, an already gentrified community, the advantaged parents of young children are not the original gentrifiers; they are not those who see themselves as urban pioneers moving into areas previously regarded as undesirable by the white middle class (Anderson, 1990; Glass, 1964). Advantaged residents have displaced the artists who paved the way for gentrification. These advantaged residents moved into a neighborhood that was already taken over by gentry, and they are less likely to be as open minded as early waves of gentrifiers. They like the idea of urban diversity and are politically correct, but they chose Hoboken for an urban lifestyle that provides easy access to New York City while giving them an abundance of coffee shops, parks and playgrounds, and "great restaurants." They did not move to Hoboken expecting to be in an edge neighborhood. They are largely uninterested in taking personal risks, particularly with the education of their children. Like the supergentrifiers whom Lees (2003) described, they are less committed to diversity and public education than were founding gentrifiers. I have at times met advantaged residents who would never consider sending their children to public schools and whose comments barely disguise thinly veiled racism and classism.

Despite advantaged residents being generally progressive, there is ample evidence that advantaged parents everywhere are not as open minded about their children's education as they are about their living environment. They tend to avoid local urban public schools and, even when it is in conflict with their values, choose to access segregated schools or gifted and talented programs, or to move to less diverse suburbs in "good school districts" when children reach school age (DeSena, 2006, 2009; Ellen et al., 2008; Roda & Wells, 2013; Stillman, 2012).

However, some advantaged parents in Hoboken do not feel this way and want to give Washington a chance. Three advantaged parents whom I met while conducting research had considered or visited Washington. One parent explained,

> I toured Washington because it was closest to us. I went with a friend. We both went with an open mind, and we both left with our minds closed. The main concern for both of us was the administrator who gave us the tour, who I believe is no longer there but had worked there a long time. He basically said to us, "Well, your kids will probably do fine here because they have you as parents." I thought, "That's not what I wanted to hear." I put another school as my first choice.

Another advantaged mother who visited Washington said, "I was impressed by the principal in the sense that she was forthright: 'If you give me 5 years, I can work to turn things around.' But . . . I didn't want my child to be the guinea pig." A few parents with a gentry mindset are willing to look at Washington, but none has chosen to send their children there, and the majority of advantaged parents with whom I spoke do not even give Washington this much of a chance.

Perceived Inequalities among District Schools

As is often the case with unrestricted choice programs, there is self-segregation within the district (Fuller et al., 1996). In addition, I heard about perceived inequalities among the elementary schools within the district. One African American mother with a child in King and a child in Washington explained,

> I prefer King. I feel like they discriminate against the kids that's in the projects honestly. I feel like the kids Uptown have more of a privilege with a lot of things. You have to see their playground compared to the things that they have in Washington, it's like, a slide and that's it. And I'm like, "Gosh, how all the kids Uptown have the nicer schools and you come down here to the kids that's by the projects and look at their school yard, like, they don't have anything?"

A former administrator at Washington joked about how many times she chose playground equipment for the children but never received it (the Washington playground was eventually built in 2011). While King has a large playground that is open to the community and very popular in the evenings and on weekends, the Washington School playground appears less impressive and is closed to the community.

These differences are not lost on the students either. A few teenagers reflected on the academic differences between the schools. One youth participant from public housing remarked, "If you come from Washington, you are supposed to be a bad kid as well, according to the stereotypes in our school [MSHS], and Washington is a pretty bad school. When I went there I felt like the teachers, they didn't really care and the students didn't really care. We had really, really bad teachers, especially math teachers." Another youth participant explained that he had switched from King to Washington and preferred Washington "because you had to worry about being stressed at King . . . Washington is type easy."

In addition, Hoboken is also a school choice district for students from other districts, something that concerns many advantaged parents. I was told that, for school year 2012–2013, no students from out of district were

sent to King; rather, they were all sent to Washington because that school "had the space." The feeling in town among those who were interviewed is that these schools are separate but not equal.

Abbott Universal Preschool in a Gentrified Community

The public preschool program in Hoboken has a decidedly different reputation than the district-run public K-12 schools. Hoboken, as a former Abbott District, still has free, all-day, early childhood education for children ages three and four years.

> New Jersey was the first state to mandate early education, starting at age 3, for children "at risk" of entering Kindergarten or primary school cognitively and socially behind their more advantaged peers. The Court's "needs-based" approach to providing supplementary programs and reforms was an unprecedented effort to target funds to initiatives designed to improve educational outcomes of low-income schoolchildren. (ELC, 2013, para. 15)

Despite its intentions to serve children "at risk" in Hoboken, the program also serves children of the advantaged. Each year the advantaged families in Hoboken worry that this will be the year that Hoboken does not receive funding for Abbott preschool. This has yet to happen and, according to the administration, they will continue to plan for the program under the assumption that it will continue to receive funding.

There are 47 tuition-free preschool classes located at six locations in Hoboken, administered by three providers. All classes are limited to 15 students, with one certified teacher and one paraprofessional for each class. In addition, there are school psychologists, a preschool intervention and referral team, master teachers, and family advocates. The school day is from 8:30 to 2:30 five days a week, with before and aftercare options available. All of the programs follow the Tools of the Mind Curriculum.

Abbott v. Burke, the most progressive school equity reform legislation in American history, has turned into a real estate boon for the advantaged in Hoboken. A realtor who works with many advantaged residents in town said, "People love it because it is—it's free day care. I mean that's what they perceive it as . . . It's all my customers' kids who go to the Abbott School, absolutely." The advantaged overwhelmingly use and are happy with the preschools (there are exceptions, such as some stay-at-home parents who choose not to do a full-day option for their children and some advantaged residents who have concerns about the food that is served by some of the providers). But when I asked advantaged residents about the Abbott preschools, I heard comments such as, "Preschool here is bursting at the seams . . . really nice that we have the option of public preschool . . . we love

it!" One advantaged parent told me of the free preschool, "I tell my friends in the suburbs, 'Just move here for these 2 years.'" Another advantaged parent called the preschools a "huge attraction." The advantaged, even those whose children have attended it, often do not know why Hoboken has free preschool—several asked me to explain it to them.

In an inverse of *Abbott*, in Hoboken, advantaged families, sometimes making more than $500,000 a year, are using the free preschool and perhaps even saving that money to invest in real estate, which increases the cost of living in Hoboken. Or some residents may put that money into savings for private school or college. In this way (discussed in chapter 8), *Abbott*, which was intended to level the playing field for urban children from low-income backgrounds, is instead providing another "leg up" to advantaged children in this gentrified city.

Despite these unintended consequences, former Abbott Districts are providing free high-quality early childhood education, which certainly is a positive. Also with their good reputation, Hoboken preschools have the potential to be socioeconomically and racially integrated middle-class schools. This could lead to further benefits for children for whom *Abbott* was in fact intended. However, the advantaged parents whom I interviewed did not perceive them that way. One parent, who understood the history of the *Abbott* legislation (a school teacher in another district), reflected,

> Because of where we live you get it, it's designed for lower SES families, we have a child advocate that came to visit us, this is a service not provided for my kid, it always made me a feel a little uncomfortable. I just hope more people use it that it's designed for, it doesn't seem to be the case. It is not the kids it was intended for, it is very obvious, you can tell, you would think it was any private preschool.

The idea that the preschools are not serving the children for whom they were intended was a frequent theme in the interviews. One publicly elected official stated that the preschool system is "serving everyone except the people it is supposed to serve [who are] opting out; it is a cultural thing, [they are] not attending in numbers we would want." I was also told that the Head Start preschool classrooms need students from other districts to fulfill the number of students who must meet income thresholds below that of most of the Hoboken preschool families.

A number of parents described their children's preschool classes as similar to the private preschools in the community. An advantaged father said, "Now that you ask, it was not very diverse, the kids from the projects go to Washington. In a way, it felt private." Other advantaged parents were careful to point out that their children's preschool classrooms appeared to be very racially/ethnically diverse, if not all that socioeconomically diverse.

Employees of the preschool programs stated that they actively recruit families in public housing, who "absolutely" participate in the program, although they admitted that the programs face a struggle to meet enrollment deadlines and make a push for enrollment of low-income students. This research did not examine actual demographics of the preschools quantitatively due to data limitations, and I cannot draw any conclusions about HHA families opting out of preschool. However, it was apparent from the research that the classes do not appear to be integrated and socioeconomically diverse, which is an area for further examination. One advantaged mother said about the Hoboken preschools, "I think certain classes look more like that [serving lower SES families] than others. Sometimes, you think, maybe the classes aren't as balanced as they could be. But you don't know somebody's background, so you are judging them."

The preschool classrooms that I observed at an open house for my own child appeared to not be integrated. A second preschool open house in the subsequent year at different sites revealed similar differences between school sites, which is discussed in the Epilogue. If the preschool program is appealing to the advantaged and low-income residents of color are also enrolling, why do advantaged parents perceive their children's classes to be made up of other advantaged children?

District preschool placement procedures, which are not overly transparent, certainly play a role. It is unclear exactly how students are placed in preschool building locations. The placement procedures emailed to parents stated the following: "The following criteria are considered to determine a child's placement for the 2013–2104 school year: (a) Special Needs/IEP Driven, (b) Existing Sibling Placements, (c) School Proximity, (d) Age (Birthday in relation to the cut-off date), (e) Allowable Demographic Factors, and (f) Parental input." Parents are not allowed to choose their preschool site outright, but they are given space on the enrollment form to write in their site preferences. Many advantaged residents engage in conversations on local discussion boards about which school site one should request. There are preschools at six locations in Hoboken (among them King and Washington). I heard several times about advantaged families asking to be placed somewhere other than Washington and going all the way to the superintendent with concerns about placement at Washington. One advantaged interviewee said,

> I also happen to have heard from a friend who has a child who is 3; she and all the other families she knows in way southwest Hoboken, their kids were all assigned to Washington, and she's more of a yuppie parent. And they all went running and screaming, and they all got moved to River [a different *Abbott* preschool site].

One mother of a 16-month-old, still more than a year and a half away from preschool, told me that she will request a change and "raise a stink" if her child is placed at Washington instead of the nearby *Abbott* preschool location, River School. It is frequently said by advantaged parents that for "downtown families, River is the best option."

These stories reflect concerns about the reputation of Washington as a school, but they also imply concerns about the racial and socioeconomic make-up of the student body. In the preschool programs, because of *Abbott* requirements, the three providers are the same across the sites, as are the curricula, schedules, and requirements for staffing. Thus, behind these concerns are likely fears about advantaged children being minorities in a school building known for serving predominantly low-income children of color and what that means for overall school culture and climate. Subtle issues with race and class usually become apparent when schooling is discussed. One advantaged parent said in passing, "The free pre-school is the reason we will stay here for a while—it is the best perk of Hoboken, and, I mean, who cares who your kid is in preschool with? What are they gonna do, stab each other in pre-K?"

One of the preschool providers is a Head Start provider of *Abbott* services, and so some of the preschool classrooms are designated Head Start. I was told that three classrooms were designated strictly Head Start, meaning that the child's family must be below poverty level ($19,090 a year for a family of three). These classrooms have some out-of-district students as well (I was told that this is necessary to fill these seats). Head Start, a program that is aimed at giving needed services to the most at-risk children, may as an unintended consequence be segregating out the most at-risk preschoolers with the best of intentions and thus possibly undermining the potential for socioeconomic integration in Hoboken preschool classrooms.

As a result of these placement policies and procedures, many of the advantaged families are sending their children to free all-day preschool, thanks to Abbott. Yet their children are not necessarily in integrated classrooms with the most at-risk children for whom the preschool program was designed. One advantaged parent remarked, "It is really nice that Head Start provides *those* children with the same services the other children get through *Abbott*"—as if the Head Start children were not the ones for whom *Abbott* was created.

The *Abbott* preschool program encourages gentrifiers to remain in Hoboken (at least temporarily), causing what I call prolonged gentrification. Thus, education affects gentrification just as gentrification influences education. Yet, social capital and cultural capital do not seem to be shared among groups in the preschool program to the extent that they could be, considering that it is a program designed for youth from low-income families that the advantaged use in large numbers.

Potential

There are glimmers of hope in Hoboken for those who are devoted to the idea of quality diverse educational options. In the early grades at King and Roosevelt, there seem to be a critical mass of advantaged parents, and yet, I encountered little criticism of those schools gentrifying or pushing out the voices of longtime parents, as has been seen in other communities where advantaged families begin to choose urban schools (Cucchiara, 2013; Posey-Maddox, 2014).

As previously mentioned, at MSHS, a handful of advantaged families are ardent supporters of the school and the education and opportunities that their children received there. As one parent wrote in a letter to the editor,

> [Mile Square] Junior Senior High School afforded our children numerous opportunities that they wouldn't have found elsewhere. The school offered them a challenging academic environment . . . Yet, what our school does for other children in the community—offering social services and a safe space to at-risk kids, and providing for special needs students whatever their circumstances—is just as important to the growth of my children. [MSHS] truly achieves its mandate of not only representing its community but of serving the needs of its students. It has also made my children into better people in the process. They have grown into young adults in an environment that actually reflects the world they live in and, in classrooms and hallways and on stage and playing fields, they have learned compassion and sensitivity towards others. (Yoon-Hendricks, 2014, para. 3–4)

One Hoboken old-timer made sure to tell me that his child was the only white child on his athletic teams at MSHS but that he had had a wonderful experience and had "not one problem." He explained in passing, in a not politically correct but honest way, that MSHS has all kinds of kids: "flamers sashaying down the hallway, blacks, whites, theater kids, jocks, and everyone in between."

Across the board, parents told me that their children form their social networks at school. As is explored in chapters 6 and 7, the environmental influences of living in a wealthy community will influence the lives of young people in public housing only to a limited extent if their social networks are not diversified through diverse schools. The only advantaged parents who describe their children's social networks as diverse socioeconomically are those whose children attend the district public schools for middle school and high school. Likewise, for those young people in public housing who described diverse social networks with friends outside of public housing from advantaged families, it was through these small networks of advantaged children who attend MSHS (or, in one case, the one family from public housing whose children attended a charter school).

HHA residents and advantaged families who experience these socioeconomically diverse networks told me how they had learned from these relationships. Some learned that parents in public housing might be stricter about socializing than they expected, and some HHA residents realized that advantaged families would be willing to let their children come to play in the HHA or to reach out and connect with their families. These, much like the stories of white graduates of desegregated schools explored by Wells et al. (2009), appear to be positive experiences for all of those who experienced some level of diversity in their schools.

Implications

The racial and socioeconomic imbalances between district-run public schools is no secret in Hoboken, and it is not just a local issue—it is occurring in cities nationwide. This is a continuation of the same issue that the Supreme Court grappled with more than a half century ago in *Brown*. However, school resegregation is not a pressing local or national concern. Rather than continuing the desegregation that was ordered after *Brown* in 1954, neoliberal policies are allowing schools to resegregate, and the courts are making racial/ethnic integration increasingly challenging and unlikely (PICS, 2007; Reardon et al., 2006).

At a time when cities are appealing to wealthy families, instead of working to integrate their children and their social and cultural capital into the segregated urban public schools, school choice options allow them to maintain segregated schools by providing true choice only to the advantaged. As a result, urban schools are not integrating despite reurbanization. One African American advantaged mother pointed out,

> That's one thing that's not just here, I think our country is battling with. Now we're starting to see some real integration right as it relates to gentrification, and our towns and people, community members—are they going to attempt to bridge the gaps of understanding and send our kids to school together? . . . It's almost like it's not important, that there's no value in having a diversified classroom. And there's a lot of value in having a diversified classroom.

School integration, just like neighborhood integration, would benefit both the low-income children of color and the children of the advantaged, as well as everyone between. I disagree with scholars who argue that a push for integrated schools is dangerous because "[the idea that] lower-income students will benefit from proximity to middle-class students evokes cultural deficit theories" (Lipman, 2011, p. 80). I do not hold that a culture of poverty among children of color necessitates integration with white children

who are innately academically and culturally superior because their superiority might rub off on low-income children of color. Instead, I believe that the cultural and social capital of *both* groups will benefit all children and that separate *is* inherently unequal and harmful for *all* children.

This way of thinking—that the push for economic integration in schools is inherently racist—is also deeply problematic because it fails to look at the bigger picture, which is how advantaged children will learn and benefit from going to school with low-income children of color. Education reformers and leaders have lost sight of the need for school integration. Yet, scholars who push back against social and cultural capital theory and economic school integration and point to larger structural problems are absolutely correct. Poverty, unemployment, and racism are the larger, more pressing concerns and neoliberalism is undermining much of the progress that has been made in reforming education.

Current neoliberal policies encourage the expansion of gentrification (Hackworth, 2007; Lipman, 2011), but this gentrification does not benefit the education of low-income children of color. Neoliberal school choice policies allow parents to choose to send their children to certain schools rather than to schools seen as less desirable. Advantaged parents can also utilize their social and cultural capital and the threat of their ability to relocate against any efforts to desegregate the school system. Their employment flexibility and capital allow them to make choices out of concerns other than convenience.

This system has not created more choice for low-income children of color on a macro level. On a micro level, certain low-income families have made the same choices as advantaged families—in Hoboken, King or Roosevelt or charter schools instead of Washington—but for the most part, at-risk public housing residents are sending their children to Washington. Far from creating competition and "lifting all boats" (i.e., public schools), as neoliberals argue, in this free-market-style education system, Washington remains a segregated school that did not have a playground until 2011 and has the lowest overall test scores in the district. I did not meet any advantaged residents who seriously considered Washington an option for their children.

It would be easy to interpret these findings on low-income parents choosing Washington, or even foregoing preschool, as typical to the "culture of poverty" (Lewis, 1965), but I argue that low-income parents, despite often living in public housing their entire lives and often having attended subpar schools themselves, care deeply about the education and future of their children, as was evident in the story of Luis in chapter 3. The decisions that they make are different from those made by the advantaged, but not necessarily for different reasons. Just like advantaged residents, low-income parents make rational decisions in what they believe are the

best interests of their children and their families. They want to get their children to school quickly and easily, to keep them safe by keeping an eye on them, and, like the advantaged, they do not want their children to be guinea pigs in schools where they will not fit in. Their cultural and social capital means that, within the public housing neighborhood and the Washington School community, their children are known and they feel that they are protected.

Just like the advantaged families, they are also making their school choices based in large part on what those in their social networks are doing and what they experienced themselves. As a Latina advantaged mother explained, these parents choose Washington because they want their children to have what they had. "This is not unique to low-income people. Why do [advantaged] people leave Hoboken? Because they want what they had [a suburban experience]."

These findings should not be viewed through the lens of middle-class values only. There are points of difference about making school selection decisions: Among parents in public housing, there is far less focus on curriculum, parental involvement in the school, and overall test scores when choosing between schools. Of more pressing concern for HHA parents are issues of convenience, discipline, and administration. To view these findings as reinforcing negative stereotypes about low-income minority families is to impose middle-class values on the findings (see Delpit, 1995; Lareau, 2003).

What Can Be Done

Hoboken and other areas that are struggling with gentrification and school choice segregating their populations can attempt to counteract this situation within the current neoliberal model, although neoliberal nonegalitarianism creates large barriers. Universal preschool, in Hoboken thanks to *Abbott*, is an important step in equalizing opportunity and must be maintained, but more needs to be done.

In 2012–2013, the Hoboken superintendent seemed to be making this a priority when he presented a new middle school plan known as a Princeton Plan (for its historic success in desegregating the schools in Princeton). A Princeton Plan calls for moving all same-age children into the same schools, regardless of geographic lines. The superintendent proposed changing Elm School to an early childhood program for the whole district, King to an elementary school, and Washington to a middle school. When this plan was presented, according to one district advocate, "there was a huge community outcry." This plan had the potential to integrate all of the students, as it did in Princeton. But there was resistance from all parents. Advantaged parents

of small children who would normally choose King expressed concerns about the shift in the school demographics, while public housing residents, who value a convenient neighborhood school, were unclear about how they would logistically get elementary school children to these locations.

The second version of the superintendent's middle school plan, which came to fruition without community anger, involved moving seventh graders into MSHS to create a middle school within the high school. This plan appeared to be more appealing to the advantaged, as it removed older children from the elementary schools and did not involve altering their elementary school options. However, this plan did not have the effect of desegregating the elementary schools to create an integrated middle-class option.

Since advantaged residents do, can, and will exercise their option to leave Hoboken or opt out of the public schools, a forced integration plan is not a realistic option and other more creative approaches must be considered.

Deliberately Prioritize Integration

One current obstacle to creating diverse middle-income schools that appeal to all segments of the population is that it is not currently a priority in the community. This was evident with the lack of success of the Princeton Plan. Self-selection and school choice have created an atmosphere in which most parents feel that they are choosing what is best for their children by self-segregating. Most public housing parents are content (although not thrilled) with their convenient neighborhood school option, and advantaged parents do not want their children sent to Washington, which is outside of their comfort zone.

When I asked district advocates to name the most pressing concerns for the schools, desegregating the schools was not mentioned. In a time of budget cuts, legal action against a charter school, and the push to improve the curriculum and increase test scores, there seems to be little motivation to anger the community by altering school demographics. Also, charter schools have created competition in the community and so allowing for district choice has given the district some ability to recruit and appeal to advantaged families. One district advocate also pointed out that they have to gear instruction toward the students whom they serve and that this could lead to further self-segregation with regard to which parents would be interested in Washington. Efforts had been made to equalize resources to the schools by building a playground, a computer laboratory, and science laboratories at Washington. As one district advocate explained, "That's why we put in a special Principal, special meaning has great skills. We did build a Mac lab there… Washington is not our stepchild." In this way, the community was not satisfied with separate clearly unequal schools;

separate but "equal" was more palatable. The community as a whole and school leadership must begin to see school integration as an effective school reform strategy for this to become a reality.

Incorporate All Parents

The district-run public schools could take lessons from the charter schools (chapter 4) to learn how to incorporate the capital of the advantaged. Many opportunities should be created for parents to come together to work in support of the district-run public schools. The school's parent leaders should not give the impression that they are a clique. New advantaged parents want to be heard and should be able to be active in the school through the parent-teacher association and ample other opportunities immediately. One charter school founder and mother explained the problem:

> So many people who have come to this charter school have bailed out because they were so frustrated. They were smart, innovative, forward-thinking people who wanted to change "x" thing and found that they would just bump up against a brick wall. The administration is so rigid and so unyielding; I mean, one example that I gave already was the lunch program. A bunch of parents apparently got together—at Elm, I think it was, either Elm or King—and told the administration, "Look, the food that you're serving here is unhealthy, we don't want our kids eating it. Why don't we go out and investigate some alternative lunch programs, and we'll just present you with our findings and you can take that information and do with it what you will?" "No, we don't want it. We don't want it" . . . They were willing to do the research! They were willing to do all of the work that would go into finding a decent lunch program. Other parents wanted to start some kind of club, I think a Great Books program, something that another group of parents wanted to start and got a "no" for no good reason.

As difficult as it might be for administrators to admit, and as difficult as it might be for teachers to have to contend with, these advantaged residents have something to offer to the district and all of its students. If no one embraces their capital, they will go elsewhere. These parents want to and feel that they need to be invested in the schools. This same phenomenon has been observed in other communities where advantaged parents opt out of local schools because the schools are "too rigid" and do not accommodate parents (DeSena, 2009).

Plans to increase integration must not ignore the extant roles, preferences, needs, and desires of other parents in the district like those from the HHA. Posey-Maddox (2014) and others have shown that when white middle-class parents become actively involved in an urban school, even when they desire a diverse school for their own children, the demographics

can shift to the extent that the students whom the school used to serve are pushed out and sociocultural tensions arise.

This has occurred in other gentrifying communities. In Williamsburg, Brooklyn, at PS 84 in 2006–2007, the tensions between advantaged parents and Latino parents became so difficult that "[b]y year's end, there was a consistent police presence at monthly parent-teacher association meetings, with each side accusing the other of using ethnic slurs. The P.T.A. resigned en masse at the end of the year, and by the following fall, nearly all of the White parents with children in the next year's incoming class had removed them" (Hanlon, 2011, para. 7).

Also, advantaged parents cannot become the "answer" to urban education reform because their inherent interests will not always align with those of the low-income or working-class population. School districts and policies must create ways to integrate schools and then maintain SES diversity; they must approach the integration of both students and parents carefully. In Fort Greene, at Brooklyn's Academy of Arts and Letters, the principal is attempting to keep the school from becoming an advantaged school and has requested that up to 40 percent of lottery seats be reserved for low-income students (Decker, 2014).

The Hoboken district is now petitioning the state commissioner to revoke the extension and expansion of Espagnol because of its alleged segregative and budgetary effects on the district. Money is being spent on both sides for lawyers, in some cases families in the community are engaged in heated debates, and children have gotten up at board meetings to plead for their school. Within this context, the Espagnol parents have publicly asked for the opportunity to work with the district to create a program that will allow their children to attend MSHS eventually while maintaining their dual-language immersion. District advocates are quick to point out how unrealistic this is, given financial constraints, and those with whom I spoke about this did not believe these parents will actually ever send their children to MSHS. They are very cynical about the claims that these parents want their children to go to MSHS.

There is no room for cynicism. They should find ways to take advantage of the capital that these parents have to offer and begin to work with them rather than assuming that the parents are not being truthful. These parents have shown through their activism at charter schools what they can accomplish. To quickly say their desires can never be met at MSHS, without giving them the opportunity to collaborate and try, is shortsighted. While, as Posey-Maddox (2014) warned, districts, schools, and administrators must not capitulate to advantaged parents at the expense of students from other families, a lack of flexibility to work with these parents or a fear of what could happen will only serve to maintain the status quo of segregation.

According to the founders, before Espagnol opened as a charter school, the founders—advantaged parents in the community with very high levels of education—approached the district about integrating their dual-language program into the district. They reported that they were completely "shut down"; they felt that no one was willing to work with them. As a result they, found it easier to apply for a charter, which they were granted. The school has been very popular with advantaged families, now has a long waiting list, and has impressive test scores and accolades.

Create True Neighborhood Schools through Magnet-Style Programming

Advantaged parents need a convincing reason to send their children to district-run public schools. The benefits that the Hoboken Board of Education commonly cite, such as advanced placement (AP) classes, a winning athletic program, a cosmetology program, a laptop program, and a variety of clubs (MomCondoLiving, 2012), will not be enough to attract advantaged residents in the numbers needed to create majority middle-class schools. Laptop programs are simply not going to attract advantaged families who live in million-dollar condominiums and whose children ask for, and receive, iPads® as holiday gifts when they are three years old. Advantaged families just expect a wide selection of AP classes and clubs. Vocational programs such as cosmetology will not draw them into a school. One advantaged mother said,

> Hoboken school boosters often say, "We have a drama program, Red Wings go!" But extracurriculars are not mainly what school is about. It's great that there is a drama program and a band, and that the football team won. But it's mainly about our kids learning in a classroom where they feel cared for and motivated to learn. It's about all these things that no one's talking about.

Advantaged parents want additional innovative, cutting-edge, premier education programs that they feel will give their children an advantage in applying to the most selective colleges and competing in a globalized world. These programs will also attract families from public housing; they do not need to be mutually exclusive. Money will clearly be an obstacle to creating these diverse magnet-style programs, but they exist in urban districts such as Yonkers, New York, and Akron, Ohio, and in the nearby suburban district of Montclair, New Jersey.

It is good that HHA families value Washington School. Neighborhood schools are an asset to the community, and it should be seen as positive that families in public housing value their neighborhood school. However, it would

benefit all students in Hoboken if that neighborhood school represented the entire neighborhood, not just the low-income housing community.

> Schools are a place where meaningful social mixing between the gentry and the non-gentry population (both children and adults) *could* occur. Schools provide structured, purposeful activities where the awkwardness of interacting with a culturally unfamiliar group can be ameliorated. Schools provide a meeting space, a pointed goal, and a reason to get to know one another on common ground. (Stillman, 2011, p. 8; emphasis in the original)

The best option, locally and nationally, then, is to create these magnet programs at the current public schools that will appeal to advantaged parents (as well as HHA residents) and to create a culture in the schools that utilizes, values, and supports all parents, whose presence will benefit all children. If an arts program or a Montessori program were developed at Washington and an innovative program in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) at King, advantaged parents might choose different options for their children based on their philosophy and the talents of their individual children, and the stigma of Washington School would be reduced. One charter school advocate said of the public schools in town, when proposing a similar idea of programs to draw in different families to different schools, "You have to do something to get those parents excited and then create a program that will draw in those parents while also drawing in the lower income families so they can both benefit from that and be integrated, and then you build that up."

The small size of Hoboken would allow schools to attract students from all over Hoboken while maintaining a neighborhood feel. I would caution, though, that offering self-contained magnet programs within schools would most likely cause within-school segregation—with advantaged families choosing magnets and lower-income families choosing the general education program—just as in Gifted and Talented and Dual Language programs in New York City (Roda, 2013). Outreach to public housing families about their various school options, as well as an admissions formula to ensure equal access and enrollment in the magnet schools, would alleviate some of the segregation. Or there is the option of making entire schools magnets rather than self-contained programs. Providing desirable specialized education programs at Washington has the potential to benefit low-income public housing residents who choose to remain in their local school, as well.

Community School Model

The district should find ways to take advantage of the desire for and location of a neighborhood school. They should not hide behind parents' desire

for neighborhoods schools as merely an excuse for the unequal demographics but should use this preference to create opportunity. Working with outside providers to bring in health care and dental services, mentoring programs, workshops for parents, extracurricular and enrichment programs for children and teenagers, new parent support groups, neighborhood groups, and other programming to create a community school model would benefit the children.

There is a growing body of research to support the idea that education reform in disadvantaged areas will be unsuccessful without efforts to disrupt disadvantage and its various associated effects (Anyon, 2005; Bryk et al., 2010; Sampson, 2012). The community school model stemming from early work by Jane Adams and John Dewey and expanded today with the work of the Harlem Children's Zone, the Broader Bolder Approach, and Promise Neighborhoods (Noguera & Wells, 2011) has great potential in viewing the school together with the community as a way to reform education for low-income children.

Currently, Washington playground is closed after school hours, which creates a barrier between the school and members of the nearby community who could potentially become involved with the school. In fact, one parent of a small child who lives within a block of Washington asked me if it was a school. Meanwhile, at King, the playground is filled with children and adults during after-school hours, creating a neighborhood school feel. There seem to have been efforts to create more of a community school model at Washington with International Dinner Night, a Holiday Gift Shop, and family nights, but these can and should be built upon.

Build Up from Preschool

The public preschool program is an asset for the community. The district should focus on preschool parents who value the public schools. Preschools are places where integration and neighborhood schooling can happen simultaneously, if advantaged parents are given a voice and feel that they are not alone. If Washington is to be an integrated neighborhood school, then parents from different socioeconomic backgrounds should have their children in the preschool there and the district should form a coalition of parents in support of Washington School, with advantaged parents actively involved in keeping advantaged students there and dissuading parents from requesting transfers.

If the advantaged become involved with and comfortable with Washington for preschool, they could then invest in it longer term. The district should build the entire system from preschool up with a focus on retaining advantaged families and diversifying preschool classrooms. This

will be challenging because the needs of both groups must be met, but there are certainly models of successfully integrated schools to be studied.

Use Available Mechanisms to Create Diversity

At the very least, placement logistics must be completely transparent (i.e., how much parental preference matters, what allowable demographic factors are used and how, and which students do not receive first choices and why). Of the public housing residents with school-age children whom I interviewed, 36 percent said that they had tried to get their children into King or Roosevelt, but the children had not been accepted there because the schools were full. I struggled to find out how, exactly, placement in the elementary schools is determined when there are more requests than available spots. I have been told that it is on a first-come, first-served basis; I have also been told it is "loosely based on geography." Luis's mother heard that her son was not placed at the school that she wanted because a sibling was currently enrolled at the neighborhood school. One father of a daughter in HHA who attends Washington said,

> I tried to get her in King, and they told me that they didn't want any kids from down here over there, when there was a bunch of kids there already… They told me to call Doctor [name] because he's the head supervisor or something, and I called every day. I even got tired of going to the office.

Yet, the need for convenience among HHA residents must also be addressed. The fact that many low-income residents in the community do not have automobiles completely undermines the very idea of choice in this community. Communities must look at creative ways to address this to aid in integration. In Hoboken, this could be done to a certain extent through scheduling and routing of the HOP shuttle. A $1 HOP shuttle bus ($.50 for students and free for children under 12) runs throughout town. These buses could have schedules and routes that would easily allow public housing residents access to all of the district-run schools in Hoboken at the appropriate times for drop-off and dismissal. Although it would not be free, it would not be cost prohibitive for many, and a voucher system could serve those who could not afford it.

Capitalize on the Desire for Diversity

Wealthy families in the New York City metropolitan area now frequently employ or attend workshops with school choice consultants (Roda & Wells, 2013). These consultants act much like private college counselors

do for higher education; they help the advantaged navigate the education terrain and find a good fit for their child.

As diversity increasingly becomes a characteristic that twenty-first-century urban parents claim to value in a school, it seems that instead of employing specialists to navigate the system, there should be specialists who are readily available to help parents and districts and schools to actively and carefully create middle-class diverse schools, using models of success as a guide.

It is difficult for parents who live paycheck to paycheck or on public assistance to take risks with their children's education, but advantaged families have far less to lose and far more from which to choose. Advantaged families should take a risk (for at least a short period of time) and work toward the goal of integration. Yet these families cannot be the entire solution and should not be given greater importance in the process than families that cannot afford to take risks. Thus far in Hoboken, the district is not in danger of letting advantaged parents take over; if anything, the perception among advantaged residents is that the district has done too little to allow their voices to be heard. I saw no tension over gentrification of schools. This once again points to the potential for this small city to create strong diverse schools.

Chapter Five

The "Golden Ticket": Gentrification, Charter Schools, and a Parallel School System

You rely on word of mouth… all the other moms were like, "Oh my god, the world is going to end if we don't get into a charter school!"

—Interview, white advantaged mother

It's not about being afraid to put your kid in public school, it's like being the only one in your group that didn't get the lottery, didn't get the Golden Ticket.

—Interview, district advocate

These charter schools act like private schools… they kick the African Americans and Hispanics out… they are re-languaging Brown v. Board… use the free and reduced kids—use their names and criteria then treat like animals… they used my son to cut the ribbon and then harassed him.

—Field Notes, Black mother

They are opening a new charter, it's just segregation! They don't want the kids from the projects. That's not who they want in their school. They don't recruit them.

—Field Notes, Black mother who works with children in HHA

Hoboken is a "choice district." Parents can choose one of the three district-run public elementary schools. This has allowed one of the elementary schools in particular to "gentrify" faster than the others, while the one geographically closest to public housing, Washington School, is far behind in terms of racial and socioeconomic integration. Yet all three of the district-run public elementary schools are majority minority, with more than half of the student body qualifying for either free or reduced-price lunches. So, if the advantaged parents are not sending their children to the traditional public schools, where *are* they sending them?

A growing number of white middle-class families are choosing to raise children in an urban setting (Palasciano, 2013a; Ritchey, 2010), and many of them are choosing the charter schools. There are three charter schools[1]

in Hoboken, and many of the advantaged parents seem to view the charter schools, in addition to private schools and moving to the suburbs, as preferred alternatives to the district's public schools. This chapter identifies who chooses charter schools in Hoboken, who does not, why, how charter schools are influencing the education of low-income children of color in public housing, and what can be done to improve the situation.

Who Attends Charter Schools in Hoboken?

The charter schools in Hoboken look very different from most charter schools in New Jersey, where the majority are in low-income, high-minority, urban districts with a majority minority student population and higher-than-state average of students who are eligible for free or reduced-price lunches. White, middle-class advantaged Hoboken parents founded the charter schools, which are largely used by advantaged children in Hoboken. As one founder said to me, "Someone from one of the charter advocacy agencies came to a meeting I went to; it was like all the charter schools. He was like, 'This is first group of white charter parents I've ever been to.'"

In the 2012–2013 school year, 606 students were enrolled in charter schools in Hoboken (noncharter district enrollment was 1,613). There are three charter schools: (a) Dewey Charter School, a progressive school, opened in 1997; (b) Hudson Charter School, opened in 1998, presenting a service learning theme; and (c) Espagnol, opened in 2010 as a dual-language school with content imparted in both Spanish and English. Information about the charter schools is summarized in table 5.1.

Each charter school has an extensive waiting list. For example, Espagnol has 171 students on the waiting list for kindergarten. During data collection, a fourth charter school, DaVinci Charter School of Hoboken, applied to be a STEM school but did not receive a charter from the state. DaVinci is included in this chapter because it is a recent example of who attempts to establish charter schools and who is interested in accessing them.

The district public schools and charter schools are serving different student populations. Figure 5.1 presents the percentages of students who are economically disadvantaged at the public Hoboken elementary schools, and figure 5.2 presents the percentages of white students at each of the public elementary schools in Hoboken. The charter schools serve a population that is whiter and less economically disadvantaged than the district schools. While Washington is 97 percent economically disadvantaged, Hudson Charter is 5 percent. While Washington is 4 percent white, Espagnol is 61 percent white.

It is apparent, not only in the hard data and in my observations but also to all residents of Hoboken, that these charter schools are attracting significantly different populations in terms of race and ethnicity and

Table 5.1 Information about charter schools in Hoboken

School	*Philosophy*	*Opened*	*Grades*	*Economically disadvantaged (2012–2013; in %)*	*Race/ethnicity (2012–2013; in %)*
Dewey	Progressive	1997	K-8	18	White/Asian: 69
Hudson[a]	Service learning	1998	K-12	5	White/Asian: 52
Espagnol	Dual language (Spanish/English)	2010	K-5	11	White/Asian: 64

Source: New Jersey School Performance Reports, by State of New Jersey Department of Education (2012–2013), retrieved from http://education.state.nj.us/pr/.

[a] Hudson Charter School (not to be confused with the private school named The Hudson School) is an interesting case. The school is the only charter school in Hoboken with a high school. However, the high school serves a different population than the elementary school. The elementary school serves a more white/advantaged population. The high school, according to one participant involved with the school, serves more minority students and many students from out of district who qualify for free/reduced-price lunch. Advantaged parents were often unaware of the high school or said that it was not an option for their children. As one publicly elected official explained, "Parents love to send their kids to [this elementary school] but that charter school also has a high school and those same parents won't send their kids to their charter high school." In reference to the inequalities in resources between the elementary and high school, one person from the high school said,

> The kids do joke about it, and the teachers know it for sure… My biggest issue as an educator is that it [Hudson Charter Elementary School] had so many more educational materials. There were so many more books and workbooks and things, and it just seemed so much more like a school, whereas one of my colleagues called our school [Hudson Charter High School] a shell. And she was right. It's a school that we bring students into every day and there are walls and there are floors, but there are no facilities. There's no library, there's no cafeteria, there's no computer lab.

socioeconomic status than the district-run public schools. One new mother in Hoboken said, "I walked by that charter school the other day—it was all White parents wearing Luis Vuitton." Of another charter school in town, a young man (not a parent) said, "I walk my dog by that school during drop-off in the morning; the street is lined with Mercedes." One woman who grew up in public housing and now works with a charter school in Hoboken said that the school has only one child from the "projects."

These are not the charter schools of Harlem and Newark, and they have very little in common with schools such as KIPP and North Star. They do not have a mission, as these other urban charter schools do, to serve low-income children of color, to close the achievement gap, or to bring children out of their family and neighborhood circumstances (KIPP, 2013; Uncommon Schools, n.d.). They are created to continue the cycle of education and advantage, not to change it for low-income children. As such, these schools do not have the intensive militaristic discipline of some "no excuses" charter schools, and they do not have exceedingly long school days or school years to prepare students for testing and keep them safe and engaged inside the school building. The test scores are generally higher than those at the district schools, but the population served is also higher income (figure 5.3).

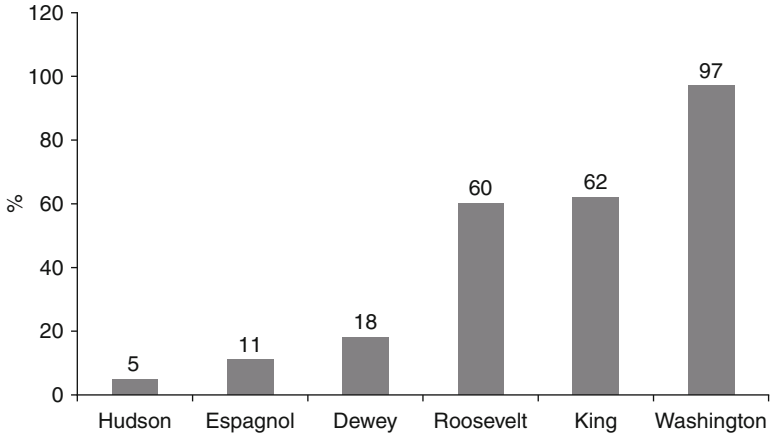


Figure 5.1 Percentages of economically disadvantaged students in charter schools and district schools in Hoboken.

Source: *New Jersey School Performance Reports*, by State of New Jersey Department of Education (2012–2013), retrieved from http://education.state.nj.us/pr/.

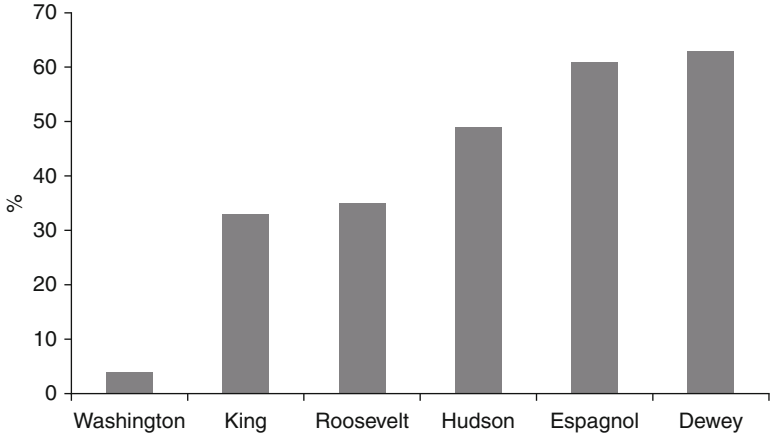


Figure 5.2 Percentages of students identified as white in charter schools and district schools in Hoboken.

Source: *New Jersey School Performance Reports*, by State of New Jersey Department of Education (2012–2013), retrieved from http://education.state.nj.us/pr/.

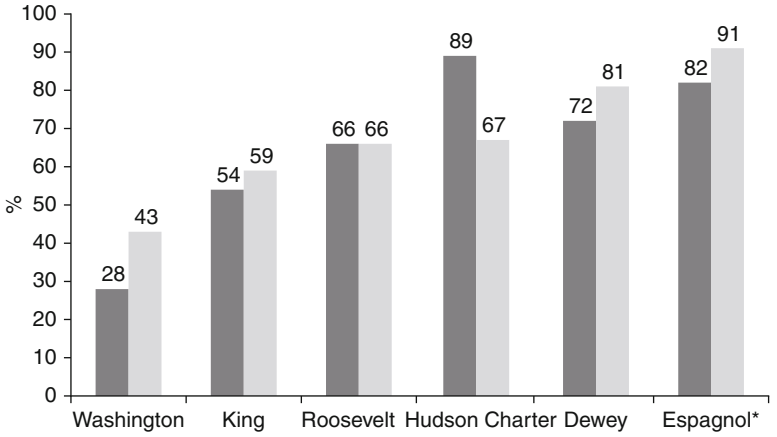


Figure 5.3 Schoolwide performance, proficient and above on New Jersey Assessment of Skills and Knowledge (NJASK; 2012–2013) for all public schools in Hoboken.

Note: LA: Language Arts; Math: Mathematics.

Source: *New Jersey School Performance Reports*, by State of New Jersey Department of Education (2012–2013), retrieved from http://education.state.nj.us/pr/.

*This school had students only through the fourth grade.

The charter schools in Hoboken are oriented to their particular themes and missions (bilingual education, progressive education, service learning). These types of charter schools are at times criticized by opponents as "boutique charter schools" and are becoming increasingly popular and the center of debate in suburbs (Hu, 2011; Mooney, 2011).

All of the charter school administrators and advocates with whom I spoke freely reported that they were actively working on diversifying their student population. Yet, charter school advocates argue that their population reflects more accurately the current demographics of Hoboken than do the district-run public schools. However, an analysis of American Community Survey data shows that approximately 27.8 percent of the school-age population in Hoboken is below poverty level. Charter schools underrepresent this demographic, since they have 5–18 percent of students who are economically disadvantaged. On the other hand, in Hoboken overall, only 11 percent of the residents live below poverty level. Charter school advocates could argue that they are retaining families that would otherwise relocate, helping to make schools more reflective of the overall population, and that, if there were more charter schools, more advantaged school-age children would live in Hoboken. However, in the current

climate, charter schools are underrepresentative of the low-income school-age population and district schools are overrepresentative.

Advantaged Parents' Views of Charter Schools

Interviews and direct observations indicate that, for most advantaged parents, applying to charter schools to avoid traditional public schools is "just what one does." One parent, who is a teacher outside the district, said,

> We did apply to all three . . . Quite honestly, in hindsight, I wish I had gone to their open houses, but I didn't physically go into any of the schools. We applied to all three because once one is in, all three of our kids would be in . . . But I felt like that's what you do, you apply to charter schools.

Having one's child accepted at a charter school is seen as the "golden ticket" (or, as one parent/charter school founder expanded, "all the chocolate you want"). Once one child from a family is admitted, siblings are given preference. Many families perceived this to be the "only" option, and if their children are not selected in the lottery, they see a move to the suburbs as inevitable. Even parents who in their heart want to support the district schools apply to the charter schools. During one observation, advantaged parents of young children expressed frustration with the charter schools and how they have influenced the district schools financially and demographically. They made such comments as, "They should just shut them down." A few minutes later, when I asked whether they were applying or had applied to the charter schools, they said that they had done so. Other district parents made similar complaints about the charters but admitted applying and that they will continue to apply each year.

Olivia's mother, who had applied to all three and was disappointed when Olivia was wait-listed, expressed this type of contradictory sentiment.

> I'm really glad that DaVinci [proposed charter school] thing didn't go through because we don't need another layer of overhead. I feel like there's almost too many charter schools like, because of the overhead. I'm sure each school has administrators that do repetitive things. I wish there wasn't as many from the funding perspective . . . I don't think we need another one for this many kids. I don't even know if we need three to begin with. But it is what it is now.

The charter schools, like the *Abbott* preschools, *are* appealing to advantaged parents, who appreciate that they are free (as advantaged parents often cite their high taxes as a source of frustration and they feel entitled to "good" public schools) and of high quality, and their children "fit in" and

do not feel like guinea pigs. As one district advocate pointed out, the fact that parents apply to all three charter schools, with such distinctly different themes, signifies a desire simply to avoid the public schools rather than a passion for a particular pedagogical style. One charter school advocate and teacher (at a similar charter school in Jersey City) who had lived in Hoboken explained this phenomenon:

> But what I find now as a parent talking to other first-grade parents, they only know of the reputation, they don't really understand. I guess as a parent, if you're an architect or a finance person, you're not that motivated necessarily to understand the philosophy, but you just know: You don't pay, the reputation's great, these kids go to great high schools out of Dewey and here, so you just know it's better.

Advantaged parents are also drawn to the fact that all three charter schools have specific pedagogical drives. An advantaged parent and charter school advocate explained that all three charter schools are "mission driven; they're very intentional. It's not even the theme. It's that they're very intentional about what they're doing and why they're doing it and they're all very self-reflective." One advantaged parent raved about the progressive style of her children's charter school, then laughed as she told me of her middle school daughter's newest elective class. "She picked genocide. I hope that's not first thing in the morning." These parents find that neoliberal school choice provides them with the opportunity to seek interesting educational experiences that appeal to them within the tuition-free public schools. Meanwhile, these same neoliberal policies are creating a test-centered environment in district schools that have to serve all students.

Another attraction of the charter schools, as opposed to district-run schools, for the advantaged is the way they encourage parent involvement. One charter school father explained,

> That's the beauty of Dewey School, and that's why we like it. As much as the faculty takes care of the school and the teachers take care of the school, there's a great involvement from the parents where all the parents know each other and they have a great way of finding what can each parent do for us. And parents are always raising their hand[s]. The PTA meetings are always full . . . For example, my friend just did all the wiring there to do wireless Internet. So I got the keys to the school, I went in over the weekend, him and I [*sic*] went and did all the wiring, they gave me the keys to all the rooms, and I checked everything out. Other parents do things like I do by participating in all these things.

Another charter school mother reported that she comes into classes to teach jewelry making to younger children and the stock market to older students.

The charter schools and the district-run public schools are clearly different in their approaches. At two of the charter schools, teachers are called by their first names, while at a district school, the principal is greeted with a harmonious, "Good morning, Mr. X" when he enters the room. While at a charter open house, the director boasts that little children sit on older children's laps at community meetings, at a district open house, parents are told not to worry that there is a "very, very minimal amount" of interaction between older and younger students; they even have separate assemblies for them. However, this is not just about the styles of the school; it speaks to the concerns of parents in both settings and has clear undertones of race and class.

Charter School Founders and Neoliberalism

The founders of the three charter schools were all advantaged parents living in Hoboken. In this way, these schools appear to be grassroots charter schools. They were not founded by large charter management organizations, and they do not appear to be backed by venture capitalists, as are many of the charter schools in the New York City area. Closer examination, however, shows that, like all matters in this book, the story is far more complicated.

The résumés of the men and women who have started, or were interested in starting, charter schools in Hoboken show that they are highly educated (often from Ivy League universities) and have experience in education and working with diverse populations. The biographies of the founding teams from the DaVinci Charter School of Hoboken and Espagnol serve as recent examples. The lead founder of DaVinci has experience teaching in a diverse New York City public school and holds degrees from Ivy League universities. Of the other seven members of the founding team at the time the application was submitted, three were teachers (two in the Bronx and one in Jersey City), two were lawyers (one lawyer is also a teacher), and three hold doctoral degrees (DaVinci Charter School, 2012). The founders of Espagnol have similar public biographies.

The charter schools in Hoboken were started by advantaged parents of young children. The two original charter schools in Hoboken were founded by one group of parents. As one founder told me, these schools were founded at kitchen tables in Hoboken in renovated brownstones in the early years of gentrification. The group of parents, Mile Square Families, met when they had little children playing in the parks together. They came together around topics of importance for them at a time when there was no Internet group or social media site on which parents could share information. One member described the group as "the people who . . . think, 'I really love Hoboken

but I'm not sure of the schools and I can't afford the private school tuition and the mortgage.'" This group wanted to investigate schools because the district schools did not seem to be an appealing option, and they wanted to stay in Hoboken. Charter schools were a new phenomenon and little was known about them. They came together around this topic.

> You go to the birthday parties and that's what it was like for us. You start to know people at the park because your kid's now a toddler and running around Church Square Park or wherever and a whole bunch of people like us, young parents, no kids in school yet or maybe just pre-K, summer at All Saints or something. We say, "Wow, that was really interesting!" People began talking at the parks, "We should continue thinking about this, learning more about the schools but not just about charter schools. We should really look down the road, learn all about this thing." So we started a kind of grassroots group.

As these families did their research, they met to craft ideas for a charter school. Eventually, differences in how to move forward led to a split in the group and two charter school applications went to the state: Hudson Charter and Dewey. To the surprise of many, both were accepted in the same year.

While the founding of these two schools appears similar to the more recent founding of Espagnol and the attempts to begin DaVinci, there are important differences in timing. The two early charter schools were founded in the 1990s, when those who were moving into Hoboken and having children tended to be those who, while they had education and were advantaged, were not rich at that time. The group included parents with education and art backgrounds. These parents say that they generally could not afford options other than public schools. These charter schools, while always accused by district advocates of being elitist, initially appealed to a more diverse group of students than attend the charter schools today. An early charter school founder described their life in Hoboken this way:

> We liked the working-class feeling of the town. Even though I went to art school, I was just starting out my career, making $12,000. We were not throwing money around. We were cooking for ourselves and there were no restaurants that we were going to and drinking the cheapest beer we could find when we were renovating our houses. It always felt very comfortable and neighborly to us. It's kind of like how we grew up.

Espagnol, on the other hand, opened over a decade later—a decade in which gentrification in Hoboken led to supergentrification and those parents moving to Hoboken and starting charter schools and interested in charter schools were parents who could afford a significantly more expensive city. As one early charter advocate explained, "The people who move

here now are buying one and a half two million dollar homes and then spending another half million dollars renovating them." Also, by the time Espagnol and DaVinci were proposed, there was a demonstrated interest in charter schools among white wealthy families, and this desire left little room for the initial diversity that occurred in the early years of the other charter schools while they were still unproven. For these more recent charter schools, the lottery would have been heavily in favor of advantaged families from the beginning.

Despite their different starting points, it is tempting to paint the three charter schools in Hoboken as grassroots or "mom and pop" charter schools. However, there have long been ties between charter schools and the business community. It is also impossible to separate charter schools from the larger corporate reform movement in education that is sweeping the nation. Ravitch (2013) detailed how NCLB and other neoliberal education reforms have "opened the door to huge entrepreneurial opportunities" (p. 12) and contended that "'reform' is really a misnomer, because the advocates for this cause seek not to reform public education but to transform it into an entrepreneurial sector of the economy" (p. 19).

One early charter school founder explained that in Hoboken a city councilman organized an information session at Stevens Institute of Technology to tell families about charter schools. As was explained to me, the politicians "dangled the notion" in front of the auditorium of advantaged parents.

> We didn't know about charter schools until the mayor—he was a city councilman at the time, Anthony Russo was the mayor, the charter legislation was still being debated down in the Senate and the House or the Assembly—and Dave Roberts sponsored this forum up at Steven's College, university, to sort of explain what charter schools were and invited some City Council members and some other people from the state to come and present this thing. It was almost as if they were dangling the notion in front of Hoboken.

It has been in the best interest of developers and politicians to have charter schools in the community that would lead to what I call prolonged gentrification. Keeping families in Hoboken benefits development because, instead of a low-income city with aging postindustrial infrastructure or a city filled with young adults and artists sharing apartments, there are middle-aged wage earners in need of larger apartments and more and more expensive amenities. Hoboken and other cities experienced the corporatization of gentrification as time progressed and with this came the direct connection between real estate development and education reform through charter schools.

There are ongoing relationships in Hoboken between developers and politicians and charter schools. Charter school advocates said that these relationships were necessary to find space in Hoboken where real estate is at a premium, while district advocates rolled their eyes, remarking, "It shows who you're willing to associate with to get what you want."

The charter school movement has changed since the 1990s. Just like the corporatization of gentrification, the charter school movement has corporatized, with large Charter Management Organizations (CMOs) receiving massive donations, the backing of venture capitalists, and most recently cities such as New Orleans, Memphis, and Newark handing district schools over to charter management operators. The charter schools in Hoboken, while small and unaffiliated with larger CMOs, can reap benefits from the larger charter school infrastructure. For example, the Board of Trustees president and a founder of Espagnol is the chief external officer of Uncommon Schools, a charter management organization with schools in New Jersey, Massachusetts, and New York. These connections serve to benefit charter schools who know how to tap into them but also can create an impression to the community that charter schools are an outside force rather than homegrown.

Just as the presence of large charter organizations can benefit the charter movement in Hoboken, the Hoboken charter schools, with their well-educated wealthy founders and parents with cultural and social capital and impressive test scores, can be used by the larger charter school movement. One charter founder described this inadvertent relationship:

> I got into this thing from a naive, liberal, democrat way of, you know, wouldn't it be better if all kids could work together and education provides opportunity for kids who might not otherwise have. All that kind of stuff, which I believe. Then what I found out is, as I would go down to Trenton and do some lobbying and as I was talking to other charter think groups, I thought, Jesus there's an awful lot of Republicans here! I wasn't expecting that, and then I found out that, in order to lobby, I began to have to give money to Republicans. Just a little bit of token money like $25 for a campaign and I would get invited to their cocktail parties or their campaign events and be able to shake hands and talk about charter school funding and everything else. Everywhere you looked there was a Republican and I began to say, "You know (and it was a theory that slowly developed), I just got screwed!" We are the worker ants of this Republican right wing strategy having to do with privatization and public education.

Independent charter schools in Hoboken, wittingly or unwittingly, are part of a larger neoliberal movement in education that is still unfolding and having effects on unionization, privatization, teacher training, and other aspects of the American education system.

Charter school founding team members in Hoboken are clearly advantaged residents. Founders and advocates were quick to point out that the application process to begin a charter school necessitates that those who are founding it be people with the economic, social, and cultural capital to devote to the process. One founder explained,

> They [the founding team] were all professionals, all upper middle class. I don't know how anybody could start a charter school if they weren't. It's so time-consuming I don't know how anybody could do it . . . I wasn't working full-time, I was freelancing and I kept scaling back and scaling back until finally I said, "You know what, I have to take a hiatus." And I couldn't have done that unless I had a husband who worked full-time and could support me during that, and the same thing with the other founders. But I don't know how otherwise anybody could do it . . . they definitely skew the system so that it makes it very difficult for anybody to do it.

A founder of another charter school said of the founders who did the majority of the work, "They're both stay-at-home moms, but still it was 50 hours of work a week for months on end." One founder who had a full-time job at the time explained that he owned his own business and therefore had a great deal of flexibility to devote to the effort.

Social capital and cultural capital allowed these parents to find one another and to come together to form charter schools. A charter school founder noted,

> There were two Hoboken moms who really got the ball rolling in thinking about and in proposing the existence of such a program in Hoboken. I met them because I was at the park with my daughter, and we were next to a dad pushing his daughter on a swing. I was pushing my daughter and she was counting in Spanish, and so he turned to me and asked, "Do you know Spanish?" And I said, "As a matter of fact, I do." And he said, "Wow, you should know that there's a proposal for a new charter school, a new dual-language charter school to be housed in Hoboken." And I said "Wow, that's great." And he said, "Would you like to get involved?" . . . Apparently, after that happened, the founder told her husband, "Go out to the park and find me an accountant!" because he had found the lawyer who's on our board through similar means.

All of the charter schools in Hoboken grew out of these informal advantaged parent networks. These networks that congregated in brownstones, parks, and playgrounds are not socioeconomically diverse, which inevitably influenced how the schools were conceived, how students were recruited, and how the school was structured.

Despite the demographic differences between the district-run public schools and the charter schools—and the fact that this demographic

difference appeals to the advantaged—the founders of these charter schools said unequivocally that this had not been their intention. These founders clearly stated that they had not intended to create parallel public schools for advantaged children; they had simply been unhappy with the available public school education and needed to provide an alternative for their children and for other children in Hoboken. They repeatedly stated that socioeconomic diversity and racial/ethnic diversity were goals of all of the schools.

When the first charter schools opened, against the school's legal counsel's advice, one founder picked children up from public housing and drove them to the charter school every day until they could configure a more reliable method.

> We were able to get our low-income population where we wanted it to be minimally. I remember because we opened up at King school. Some kids' moms couldn't get them there, because they have another kid. So against the advice of my lawyer, the school's lawyer, I said, "Well, I have permission slips." He said, "In the event of an accident, a permission slip is worthless." Every morning before work I'd take my car down and pick up three or four kids and drive them.

The charter schools in the 1990s were more diverse, as was the case with a similar charter school, Learning Community Charter School in nearby Jersey City (Morrison, 2011). A founder of one of the first charter schools in Hoboken shared that in 1999–2000 they were 41 percent students receiving free/reduced-price lunches; that number dropped significantly he explained to 13 percent in 2014–2015. Over time, demographic changes in the community led to what one advocate described as more white ping-pong balls in the charter lottery. "Then slowly that [SES diversity] has dropped lower, lower and lower. I honestly believe, not due to any lack of effort, but just, I mean it's a lottery; but when you have that many white ping pong balls in the lottery, you're going to reach in and just keep pulling out White families."

One charter school founder openly expressed disappointment about the lack of diversity.

> *Participant*: I saw it [the charter school] as a means of achieving social justice, as cheesy as that might sound. To me that's very important, that this effort be something that benefits underprivileged kids, that it be a way of mixing the components of the community together and that that mix would benefit everybody, including my kid.
> *Interviewer*: Has it gotten where you were hoping it would?
> *Participant*: No. It has not.

The school advocates reported ways that they work to increase diversity or recruit a more diverse group of children. One charter school representative said that the school has a parent group devoted to increasing diversity. "There's always diversity committees, there's always outreach and we accept 32 kindergartners some years. I don't know the exact figures but some years with sibling preference, there'd be like 8 seats available. The town is overwhelmed; the people in the lottery are overwhelmingly white middle class. It's just very hard."

Another founder stated their goal was economic integration. "He [Kahlenberg] does all this research on economic integration, so that's our goal…It's in the application…That's really our goal." Founders from another charter school even pointed out that its location (on the southwest side of Hoboken, about four blocks from public housing) was a problem for some advantaged parents who expressed concern about sending their children to that neighborhood. They, in turn, hoped that this location would appeal to people in public housing. A founder of this charter school explained that they had attempted to recruit families from public housing.

> *Participant*: We did open houses. We tried to hold them at all of the public pre-schools, because they do a good job between Hopes and Miles Square [*Abbott* preschool providers] of having a pretty good mix of demographics. We got a lot of resistance from the public schools. They wouldn't let us do it. But Hopes, which has its own building, as well, let us do it with them, so we did open houses for the parents. But it was a very self-selected group that came to it in the evenings…We…offered Pizza Night and information sessions at the Housing Authority and Applied Housing, which is low-income. It was such a low turnout it was abysmal. We have the Director of the Hoboken Housing Authority as a parent here, and he promoted it, and his wife promoted it, and that kind of outreach just didn't work.
>
> *Interviewer*: Could you give me an estimated number of how many people attended?
>
> *Participant*: Well, for one of them it was zero; it was just us. And for another one there were probably, I don't know, six people. But none of them had school-age children; they all just came because they were curious.

An administrator from another charter school said,

> There is a real concern on the part of our enrollment committee and on the part of the school in general, to reach out to all aspects of our community. So now we do a lot of outreach. We do a number of things. Traditional stuff, we have some open houses here and invite people, but we also have people who go to various parts of the community, including some of the projects, at various events where we have a table, we have flyers on it. Some

> of the people who work in the school, we have one of the people who works here, she actually has an open house in her apartment. So, outreach in that part of town, basically the poorer side of town . . . There's a day where we have kids at 8 o'clock in the morning going out to the PATH train and around town giving out flyers for the school, where we blanket everybody in the town.

A founding parent from one charter school said that in the year they opened, they distributed applications in English and Spanish but received only one back in Spanish.

Founders and advocates of Espagnol seemed to believe that the dual-language Spanish-English focus and location just blocks from HHA would be a draw to the HHA community and would create a socioeconomically diverse school. They pointed out that the decision to use Spanish, not French, for instance, was an effort to create this diversity.

> We thought this would be a great place to locate the school, among other things because of the demographics of Hoboken, where you have a school-age population that's 60 percent Latino. So we thought that our student body would reflect the demographics of Hoboken. As far as I'm concerned, that's great—among other things because dual-language schools have been shown to be the most effective programs for raising the academic achievement of Spanish speakers in particular. And, of course, not all of the Latino students in Hoboken are Spanish speakers but many of them are, so I think it would be a great place to house such a school . . . Also, I see a dual-language school as a way of presenting bilingualism in a positive light, which is the way that I think that it should be presented and that it hasn't been historically presented in the U.S. It seems that every person who was born is Spain who has a child in Hoboken has tried to get the child into Espagnol. We have lots of Spaniards. That's one interesting paradox to me. The higher-SES Spanish-speaking families have been very drawn to this school, whereas the lower SES families who would benefit the most from this kind of program—whose kids would do the best—have not come in the numbers that we had hoped and expected

An African American woman who works with children in public housing said that the problem with the plan to attract HHA residents to a dual-language immersion school is that Hispanic residents in public housing "are not those kind of Hispanics." Yet, Luis's mom clearly stated that she wanted this for her child of Puerto Rican descent. According to the State of New Jersey Department of Education (2012–2013), there are no students who speak Spanish as their primary language enrolled at Espagnol (or any of the charter schools), while Spanish-speaking students constitute 5 percent of the students at Washington, 2 percent at Roosevelt, and 3 percent at King. One advocate from Espagnol said that they have asked the

district to send them their ESL students to strengthen their own program by having more Spanish speakers, but there is no formalized legal route to make this happen.

Charter school founders and administrators often seemed perplexed by the lack of interest in their schools on the part of the public housing community. One asked me for advice on recruitment. Others seemed to think that since recruitment efforts had not been as fruitful as they had hoped, over time word would spread and the numbers of low-income children of color would increase. One expressed frustration that there is no legal way for them to create a more diverse student body. These observations confirm research that shows a "lack of a charter school policy framework that would support those charter school operators who want to create more diverse schools" (Wells, 2002, pp. 16–17). Yet others seem to have given up hope that they can diversify in the face of changing demographics, overwhelming parent interest from the white middle-class community, sibling preference, and so many white ping-pong balls in the lottery.

Charter School Parents and Diversity

While charter school founders made it clear in interviews that it was important to them to create a socioeconomically and racially diverse charter school, advantaged parents do not always share this focus. Charter school parents do not readily say that they choose charter schools because they prefer a whiter, more middle-class student body. However, they admit that their children fit in at charter schools more easily than at Washington, where they would be "guinea pigs." One charter school parent stated, "I did visit Washington. I did not think it was horrible. Some people I was with did. Everyone feels the same way about it: they do not want to send their kids there. They want their kids to stay with their friends and feel comfortable." This kind of statement about "everyone" shows that, below the surface-level valuing of diversity, advantaged parents feel a clear discomfort with the demographics and feeling of Washington and are concerned about whether their children would feel comfortable there. These parents are generally well educated, liberal, and politically correct; for the most part, they are careful in what they say.

Yet, a founder of one of the charter schools explained how she faced concerns from parents over the possibility of having too many children from HHA when they were opening their charter school near public housing:

> Professionally employed people, upper-income people, whatever you want to call them, some of them were concerned that there would be too many kids from the Housing Authority or from the West Side of Hoboken who

> would enroll and so they were apprehensive and they were asking us how many of these kids are going to be in this program . . . I had a parent ask me if the area [southwest Hoboken] was safe to walk by in the daytime. And you know, I just thought, "What planet do you live on, woman?" I mean, my God!

Two leaders from a charter school reflected on parents' opinions on diversity.

> *Interviewer*: Do you face resistance from the more gentrified parents, as we would call them, to recruiting kids from public housing or in this neighborhood?
> *Participant 1*: I think there are examples of them sometimes resisting. I don't think it's so explicit, but I think sometimes there is resistance to some of the accommodations we make.
> *Participant 2*: I think sometimes there are preconceived notions.
> *Participant 1*: Yes, maybe that's what it is. Or assumptions made. There's not always an understanding of the nuances in the classroom, the subtleties in the classroom, and that everybody can't afford the same things.
> *Participant 2*: There are differences in cultural frames of reference, and the power of majority does not perceive. It doesn't understand how that frame of reference functions, and therefore perceives it as, "If it's not acting like us, then it's not right." I've seen that happen, but not often. I think there's some cross-cultural communication straining and things like that.
> *Participant 1*: And I do think that people who bring their kids here are open to that, in the intellectual sense, anyway. A lot of parents I think are coming here hoping that they're coming for an experience that is broader.
> *Participant 2*: Yeah, but what is interesting is that you don't see that within the communication of the children. It's much less palpable. It's in the communication of the parents.

Two advantaged charter school parents reflected tellingly on diversity at their school:

> *Participant 2*: I think our school would like to be more diverse.
> *Participant 1*: They say they would, but I think it's really diverse.
> *Participant 2*: They meet once a month to talk about that kind of stuff and how to outreach to other families. I feel it's fine, though. People are applying for it. You can't force people to come to your school, either.

Many of these advantaged parents do have a "gentry mindset" (as discussed in chapter 4) and appreciate diversity. Many advantaged residents named "diversity" as one of their favorite aspects of Hoboken. When asked whether she wished Hoboken did not have public housing, one charter school parent replied,

> That doesn't bother me. The other night I was saying I love the diversity my children grow up in. It's great. I think it only stands to help them when they're older, and be better human beings when they're older. I couldn't imagine living in a place where everybody's the same and we all have the same jobs. I would hate [for] my kids to be in that kind of atmosphere. I think [diversity] is good for them. Having that [public housing] there doesn't affect our life.

Diversity is increasingly becoming a commodity that urban families who see themselves as sophisticated and worldly appreciate. These families like to see their life choices as providing their children with a diverse living environment. Yet, most advantaged parents feel more comfortable with their children being in a charter school. The charter schools fit their pedagogical preferences and have a student body with plenty of children who look like their children. The open houses felt like private school open houses. When I attended a charter school open house, all of the attendees appeared to be advantaged parents. I described the open house in my field notes:

> The presentation and question-and-answer portion went on for an hour. There were 12 sets of parents in the room. They all appeared to be yuppies and were quite well dressed…About 40 minutes was devoted to discussing pedagogy, schedules, immersion, and neuroscience. We were given two handouts on the science behind their curricular strategies…A number of parents in the room knew each other and I heard two discussing yesterday's open house at a local private school.
>
> The director discussed how they use a specific math program because that is the premier textbook. The afterschool programs were a big concern, and she touted swimming, knitting, and a lot of others. She said, "Your child will be receiving a premier education that elsewhere would cost between $35,000 and $60,000." She answered questions about what parents *can* do to help with homework…The program was described as progressive and academically rigorous. The director also drops how graduates of programs like this go to places like Yale and Princeton together and are more likely than their competition to land jobs against the other Harvard MBAs for the $250,000-a-year position.

I had a similar experience at another charter school open house.

> The room is bursting. At 10 o'clock another wave enters, and the teachers and parents and administrator rush to provide more seating. There must be at least 40 visitors packed into one classroom. The majority (all but two couples) appear to be yuppies—many seem to know each other, children are fashionably dressed, and the parents wear expensive clothes. By the time it gets underway, there is a crowd sitting in the hallway, as well. The

principal, enrollment coordinator, parent/board of trustee member, and three teachers (including a music teacher) are there. They are all white. The principal starts by saying, "We are all very, very available because we love talking about this school." The first 20 minutes are spent discussing the lottery. They currently have no openings but will fill them as they become available. In kindergarten there are 32 possible spots for 2013–2014 but 16 siblings, so if they all attend there will only be 16 available spots. They are expecting 200 applicants (that's how many they had last year). After the discussion of the lottery, the principal gives a PowerPoint presentation on the school and its philosophy for about an hour. He begins with quotes from President Jefferson and Alfie Kohn. He discusses how he "fortunately does not very often have to discipline a student, but when necessary he cannot tell you how many times a sixth or seventh grader waiting outside his office for him to return has pulled out a book to read. They just love to learn!" He discusses character development, social justice, intrinsic motivation, collaboration based on a business model, and community meetings where seventh or eighth graders have 5- and 6-year-olds on their laps. He shows pictures of simple machine projects where the sixth graders built things such as a pooper scooper and dog entertainer. One young boy in attendance says, "Cool!" and the principal responds, "That right there is the whole point." The children in the pictures are well-dressed White children. He shows a picture of a "typical" report card and chuckles as he contrasts it with a sample report card from his school. These average four to five typed pages of assessment, beginning with personal and social development and including personalized assessments from each teacher. There is a "narrative for every subject." The teachers, he says, spend weeks and weeks on them. He said parents say repeatedly, "I can't believe how well the teachers know the kids."

When asked about parental involvement he says, "You will be asked as much as you possibly can to be involved. We love having parents here." A parent explains that "parents are welcome and can easily observe how well the teachers are doing." This parent says that for years she has been coming in to teach jewelry making to the younger children and the stock market to the older kids, since those are "her things" and she just loves the "open and transparent learning environment."

These are climates in which the advantaged parents feel comfortable, and what is described at these open houses is the sort of experience that they desire for their children. Those whose children are accepted feel that they have quite literally won the lottery, that elusive "golden ticket," because the school is free but feels to them like a private school and their siblings will get priority. Charter school climates in Hoboken are also in distinct contrast to the ones at the district public schools. Advantaged parents feel that they fit in and that their children fit in better at the elementary charter schools. They feel that it is in their children's best interest to apply, and so they do so.

Why HHA Residents Do Not Apply to Charter Schools

HHA residents are not applying to charter schools in any significant numbers. The reasons that HHA residents give for not applying to charter schools are in three categories: (a) a preference for the neighborhood school, (b) *charter confusion*, and (c) a desire to fit in.

Preference for the Neighborhood School

HHA residents gave many reasons for choosing their neighborhood school, Washington. Almost every parent from public housing who was interviewed had grown up in public housing, and many had attended Washington. Although I did not hear any of these parents say that they had a great experience there, it is an institution that is known to the family. As is the case with many neighborhood schools throughout the country, the community values its local public school (Lipman, 2011). When asked why HHA residents are not applying to charter schools, one Latina founding parent of a charter school explained the struggle that she faced in recruiting families from HHA: "They want tradition, they want the known, they want what they had."

In addition to comfort with the school, the location in their neighborhood is a major factor, as Washington is the school most convenient to public housing. When I asked the focus group why so many of the children from public housing attend Washington, they answered in unison, "It's closer." An HHA mother of a son at Washington explained why she sent her son to Washington: "Convenience for us. You know, it's hard for a child to be farther from their home for school, even though other people may think different." However, Espagnol Charter School is just two and a half blocks from Washington and shares facilities with the Boys and Girls Club (used by many HHA resident youth); so while location is a constraint that undermines choice in some cases, it is clearly not the entire explanation. The next closest charter school is less than half a mile from HHA, and the third is approximately three-quarters of a mile away.

Another factor in school choice is that HHA residents, like the advantaged, want their children to have friends and peers like themselves, which they believe they will have at a neighborhood school. This is not true for all HHA residents. Some, like Luis's mother in chapter 2, particularly those holding working-class or middle-class jobs, pointed out that they wanted their children away from the children in the public housing, expressing concerns about peer effects similar to those expressed by advantaged residents. For many others, however, "fitting in" is a concern. As one charter school founder put it,

> Many [public housing residents] express a desire to be with their friends and neighbors. I have found that within the school—like, for example, last year I remember at the beginning of the year there were a couple of parents who came in with their kids, they were specifically from the Housing Authority. And I remember they actually pulled them out within a week or two, and some of the reasons they gave were that they didn't know all the kids, so they said, "Well, she feels uncomfortable because she doesn't know everybody."

One teenager pointed out that the teachers at Washington "understood where they were from and what they were dealing with"—something that she found to be positive. One young man from HHA whose sister attends Espagnol said, "She goes to Espagnol right here, and a lot of her friends live uptown, and they'll be trying to have play dates, and they're like, 'She never wants to come to my sister's house, to my house. She always has to go to her house.'" One teenage participant explained her transfer from a Catholic school to Washington:

> It was a lot more comfortable because like, in the Catholic School, literally only me and two other people lived in the projects. But in Washington, most of them were from the projects, so, like, you knew everybody, so it was okay . . . The teachers understood, like, if you were in a bad mood about something that happened at home. Because they understood where you lived and how everything would probably stress you out.

HHA residents also have a great deal of social capital in their own community, providing a feeling of safety and comfort, just as the advantaged do in their community. One HHA resident said,

> Parents look after each others' kids really here. I've had a couple of moms who knew my daughter and when she would play with their kids and I never had to worry about anything happening to them because they all watch each others' children. When it comes to the kids, we're like a family, but with the other things, no. But when it comes to the kids, they bond. No one messes with our kids.

Luis's mother explained how a phone call from a friend alerted her quickly to a problem the friend witnessed her stepson experiencing at the neighborhood school, and she was able to get to the school immediately to check on him.

Charter Confusion

Parents in public housing are confused about what charter schools are and how to access them. I asked HHA parents to name the charter schools

in town and asked what each one was like or its style or theme. Not one parent from public housing (except the deviant case I purposely sought out to interview because her children attend a charter school) was able to identify all of them by name. A large number included private schools in their listing, indicating the confusion about what a charter school is. They were described as costing money and hard to get into, and HHA parents expressed hopelessness about their children being accepted. Even those parents who said that they had heard that the charter schools are better than public schools did not seem to think that it was a realistic option for their children and they had not visited them or applied.

Of the 12 randomly selected HHA parents interviewed, half could not name any of the charter schools or their locations, none had ever applied to a charter school, only one said that she had been given an application, and none could name the themes or philosophies of all three. Only one parent correctly identified any of the themes or philosophies and that was for only one of the schools.

Some parents and HHA community members do not know that the charter schools are tuition-free public schools. One member of the focus group explained, "Yeah, but most of the parents choose for their child to go to Washington, not only because it's closer, but to bring your child to a charter school for most parents from down here feel like it's going to be too expensive. So, once you hear, 'Oh, it's too expensive, I can't afford it.'"

Another HHA resident said, "Most of my cousins actually go to All Saints charter school, and they go there because they got scholarships there." Another said a relative attends a charter school but "with financial aid." When asked, "Have you ever thought about the charter schools in town?" a father of a daughter who lives in HHA responded, "No. I was going to try and put her in Mustard Seed, but then she would have to repeat the fourth grade again." All Saints and Mustard Seed are both private schools, which again demonstrates the confusion about what a charter school is and whether or not there is a charge to attend.

Parents who were aware of the option seemed confused or disheartened by the admissions lottery process. One African American born-and-raised Hobokenite, when asked whether she had ever applied to the charter schools, responded, "No, basically because I heard it was like a raffle. Like, somebody picks the raffle and if they win, they get into the school." Another said, "I just know that they're like, really good schools, nothing other than that . . . I also hear that it's really tough to get into the charter schools because they go by lottery. So I never tried."

Others mentioned that charters have a good reputation but said that they had never applied. When asked what she knows about charter schools, one HHA mother of two said, "Not very much, but I heard it's supposed to be a

very good school." When asked whether she had ever thought about charter schools, a mother from HHA with a daughter in Washington replied,

> I haven't applied, I don't know why honestly. But I've heard about them and I really am interested in them, but I haven't had, I guess, yet the time to go and find out. I wish you could apply online, but I heard there was a waiting list for charter schools. But I heard they're much better and I really, really want that for her. Like, I personally don't want to leave her in Washington for eighth grade, so that's definitely something I want to look into.

The one parent who was deliberately sought out as my "deviant" case to interview because she lives in public housing and has children at a charter school said that she had found out about charter schools online after her children had already attended Washington (with which she was unhappy), King, and the private All Saints School (on a scholarship).

> I am a very online kind of person. I Google things and research and print and fax . . . I have those resources, I sit in front of a computer all day [at work at a university], but we have that at home, too. I provide access to computers, printers, Internet for my children. I have a school bin with supplies and ink. I refill it—Lord knows we go through glue sticks.

This HHA mother seemed to have a significant amount of middle-class social and cultural capital. She was currently working on her second master's degree and was employed by a university. This middle-class capital has propelled her above charter confusion experienced by the other low-income public housing residents.

The confusion about what a charter school is cuts across socioeconomic status. Advantaged parents who do not have school-age children are similarly confused. However, when advantaged parents begin the school search and selection process, they learn about the "golden ticket" through their social networks; because families in public housing do not access charter schools in any significant numbers, they cannot inform each other about the process.

The application process can be an additional obstacle. Although the application asks parents for only basic information such as name, address, telephone number, email address, and the school that the child currently attends, the word "application" alone suggests something intimidating. One advantaged resident who is not yet a parent commented that the son of someone whom he knows did not get into the charter school because he was not "smart enough." This is impossible and against the law, but the comment indicates confusion across the SES spectrum about the admissions process to a charter school and the use of the word "application."

Having to complete and submit an application early in the year for a January lottery is an additional obstacle. One teenager said that his family had missed the deadline. Two women who work with Hoboken *Abbott* preschool admissions told me that they often see low-income families miss the deadline for preschool which is still later than the charter school deadline. Morrison (2011) found that the early deadlines for charter school applications adversely affected low-income and less-educated parents and thus influenced the demographics of a progressive charter school in neighboring Jersey City.

Parents who applied to the charters reported that they got the applications at the schools themselves, online, or at the Art and Music Festival in town. The application process, from acquiring one to submitting it, may prove to be an obstacle for parents who are not familiar with the intricacies of the school system, are not connected to others in the community who are applying to or attending these schools, or have limited English-language or literacy skills. DeLuca (2007) found that, with the Moving to Opportunity Program, a lack of knowledge about schools and school choice may have contributed to the lack of improvement in education outcomes when low-income public housing residents moved "to opportunity."

HHA parents also have misgivings about these schools that are unknown to them and new to the community. Because the founders who initially led the recruitment effort are not from the same background as them, they have difficulty in overcoming these concerns, more so than advantaged parents. Since their social networks, for the most part, do not include many charter school advocates or parents, they may question who is running these new schools and where they will be housed (always an issue in a community with a tight real estate market).

HHA residents are distrustful when charter schools first open because they are new and there are always unknowns. There is also frequently a general distrust of those who have not yet established a relationship of trust with the community. One charter school had no building when it started, and the founders had to tell parents whom they recruited for the lottery that they were not sure where the school would be housed. One founding parent recalled, "It was very hard to sell a school that didn't have a building." Another charter founder explained that they had attempted to recruit families from public housing, and the parents had made comments such as, "Where is it located?" "Oh it seems a little bit far," and "I don't know anything about that." There was resistance to something different, and many parents did not want to be a part of something new. "So we knew that the newness was definitely an issue we found." The HHA parent who was interviewed because her children attended a charter school presented one possible reason that more HHA parents do not apply to charters:

> I'm not sure, scared of change but scared of the perception of change. "They're gonna treat my kids different, live in a different area." But this creates a horrible circle. HHA is a close-knit community of families that have been there for decades, they have seen Hoboken change around them without their input. It makes them wary and concerned.

Desire to Fit In

Another reason HHA families do not apply to charter schools is that they recognize an insider/outsider dynamic at play in the charter schools, with advantaged parents as insiders and low-income people of color as outsiders. This is evident at Espagnol, where the advantaged families use the school during the day for Espagnol. Then, because they share a building with the Boys and Girls Club, a predominantly different group of children come into the building for the Boys and Girls Club after school. This insider dynamic contributes to charter confusion, leaving some families such as Luis's, described in chapter 3, to assume that these schools are not an option because of the demographics; it may also drive others away from the school even if they know that it is an option.

HHA residents may feel that their children do not belong in the charter schools because few other children look like their children. One Latina charter parent explained, "It's because they don't see a lot of people like them in the schools." As I walked by the students from Hudson Charter School as they waited for the school bus,[2] I observed only one non-Asian minority family; the rest of the parents appeared to be typical advantaged parents. A group of parents from Espagnol hired a private bus that stops at the Shipyard and at Maxwell Place, two of the luxury riverfront buildings in uptown Hoboken (three-bedroom apartment rentals at the Shipyard are around $5,000 a month) and then takes the students across town to Espagnol, located just blocks from public housing.

There are also after-school activities and class trips that parents pay for that can make HHA parents feel that their children do not fit in. Although all of the school administrators consider this and attempt to mitigate the issue with free options and/or some scholarships, it is still something with which the parents who are not advantaged must contend. One charter administrator spoke of a parent from HHA who transferred her children out of the school:

> Another thing she [HHA mother] said that was interesting was that, I think we had an enrichment program. There were lots of free classes, but there were also paid classes. I think the mix of demographics was intimidating because they had come from Washington, which is not at all mixed demographically. And I think it felt like, with a bigger socio-economic mix,

> I think they felt…I think they were intimidated by it…I think the parents felt intimidated by it because she said, "Well, there's this after-school program and"…But I think [for] the parents it was a very intimidating culture clash.

After-school programming can be a concern in terms of attracting and retaining socioeconomic diversity. The charter schools are aware of the issues with expensive after-school programming but also feel pressure from wealthy families to provide high-quality programming.

> We had a huge like, I don't know how many meetings, staff meetings and PTA meetings and board meetings were taken up discussing whether or not to make our after school clubs pay as you go kind of thing. We have an after-school program for parents who work and just for whoever needs it. It doesn't cost a lot, and some kids are free. All of a sudden it was a different population; they were like, "I can't come pick up my kids at 6:00 pm, I want them doing something meaningful. I want them having a chess club and I want them having dance…And we're like, "Well, we take them to the park and then we help them with their homework." Like, that's it, you know. But they wanted stuff, and then they were willing to pay for it. So they're like, "We've got a great instructor in, you know, basket weaving, or something, and it only costs $25 a kid and we want to bring that person in." And it was like this huge discussion because it's a whole different thing. Because traditionally at our school no one is ever excluded from anything, and we had to think it through: "OK, can we afford this? Like, how many kids can do that and can we afford the kids who can't afford it?" You know? It completely shifted a whole bunch of things.

Some of the schools have different programming available and some provide a limited number of scholarships to their high-quality after-school programs.

Class trips can be an issue as well. However, one of the administrators of a charter school explained how the administration harnesses the economic capital of the wealthier parents to try to avoid children feeling or being left out.

> There's a cost attached to the trip. We also on the trip form ask if the parent feels they can give a little extra support for kids who can't do it, and so many parents give a little extra. I had a parent call me up the other day. I sent out the school supplies [list], and the parent called me; it was a new Kindergarten parent. And he said, "We want to give extra for anyone who can't afford it." It's sort of the culture of this place. Everyone's always giving, so a lot of parents pay the cost for other kids. But they never know who, it's always anonymous. So there's never a kid who can't go, there's never any embarrassment. And that's just part of the culture of the school.

Two advantaged parents from that charter school confirmed this:

> She's got a trip next week, she just told me it's $274. I'm like, "Thanks for the notice." But she says that the teachers are like, "I want everybody to come, if you don't have the money, don't worry about it, we'll sort it out. You're all coming." They all go home with a form that says $274, but he makes a point of saying "You're all coming." Those kids, they certainly know who they are. They'll get help.

One of the charter schools has a trip to Puerto Rico, which, although I was told no student is turned away, leaves a perception in the community that this is an expensive school. I often heard false statements about costs involved with these schools and their trips; although these were false, they are representative of the perception of these schools in the community and as important as reality in understanding who feels comfortable accessing the schools.

At one charter school, middle school students can go out to lunch. Frequently during my research, I observed groups of these students eating together at Panera Restaurant on Washington Street. This has potential to leave out students who cannot afford to eat at Panera or those who qualify for free or reduced-price lunches. When I asked one person involved with this school about that, she said.

> They always say like, it's the needs blind kind of thing. Like, we never announce who gets free and reduced lunch. You just get lunch or you don't get lunch. But there are some kids who get free lunch; I mean school lunch, every day. And there are some kids who don't. And so it's like, the kids aren't stupid.

Similarly, at one charter school, I was told that parents volunteer to provide communal snacks in classrooms and that the students and teachers are aware of who provides them each week. The frequency of providing the snacks and the quality and nutrition of the snacks appear to differ along socioeconomic lines—something that is not lost on the students, staff, or parents.

A related issue is parent fund-raising, which alienates lower-income parents (Morrison, 2011). One charter school founder in Hoboken explained, "Parent fundraising makes [charter schools] feel like more of a suburban school." For example, at a fund-raiser for Espagnol, tickets cost $65–$80 per person, and the event featured an auction with such items as organic dairy products ($420), summer camp ($550), Jets tickets package ($825), Long Beach vacation ($2500), Porsche for a weekend ($1,300), boat slip ($1,000), and complete party ($1,900). A participant said that a benefit for

the Hudson Charter School at the W Hotel (tickets were $90) was so fancy that she thought "Queen Elizabeth was going to walk through the door." Auction items included a golf threesome and a cocktail party for 24 guests at your home (each valued at $1,600) and a visit to the set of "Blue Bloods" and lunch with Donnie Wahlberg (valued "priceless"). These schools are clearly benefitting from the economic, social, and cultural capital of the parents who access them, but it makes low-income parents feel that they do not fit in or that these schools are not even an option.

The founders and administrators appear conflicted about the fundraising issue. Because of their limited funding, they feel that they must embrace parents' desire to contribute; at the same time, they seem concerned about how it appears for a public school and how it affects school dynamics for those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds.

> *Participant 1*: So we have to fundraise. Especially with the quality of programming we offer . . . We have to raise funds, but it's always a challenge to figure out how to tap into the fact that we know a lot of parents can afford—they pulled their kids out of private schools to come here and we know they can afford to support this school—how to tap into that. And they want to. They're very eager to. They're saying, "What can we do? How can we help?"
>
> *Participant 2*: Well, they're saving. When you look at a private school that would offer this, $35,000 easily.
>
> *Participant 1*: . . . without alienating the parents who can't. So tonight's our PTO meeting, in fact, and we had a whole meeting about how to address that because it's delicate. They don't want to be nickled and dimed. A lot of parents say, "I'd rather just give a fat donation and leave it at that, just ask me for it." So we have to ask for it. But we don't want the people who can't afford to, to feel like it's mandatory. So it's a very, very delicate process.

Another founder reflected on the change that occurred as the population of the school became increasingly higher income. "I know there are some of the younger families that would be sending their kids to Stevens or some other private school, so they're happy to give a few thousand dollars a year, you know? We have an auction every winter that brings in 25, 30, $40,000." She also mentioned that events such as golf outings that are seen as elitist have caused controversy. These founders are generally quite reflective on the influence that this has on the school culture and diversity.

However, a charter school parent reflected on the issue of socioeconomic diversity at fund-raisers and school events differently from administrators:

> That's life. There are functions that are free, and there are functions that cost money and more money. Like that Mardi Gras dance they have to

> raise money for the school, the ticket is $100 a ticket. That must eliminate a certain number of families. But then you have the Halloween Day, and it's free, and the holidays we celebrate, those don't cost money, so . . . to raise money for the school, you have to have a $100 ticket. You can't get away from it, as much as it does eliminate some people.

A more controversial feeling, expressed by some, is that families from the HHA do not feel wanted because they are not wanted, in charter schools. One African American mother (not from HHA) who is a visible and outspoken (at times) opponent of charter schools said publically at a Hoboken School Board meeting,

> These charter schools act like private schools . . . they kick the African Americans and Hispanics out . . . They are re-languaging *Brown v. Board* . . . use the free and reduced [-price lunch] kids—use their names and criteria. Then treat [them] like animals . . . They used my son to cut the ribbon and then harassed him.

She went on to describe alleged abuse that she said her child had suffered at the charter schools.

To conduct a lottery that will have a diverse enough pool of applicants, recruitment must reach all residents. Only one of the HHA parents whom I interviewed said that she had received a charter school application and that from only one charter school. Luis's mother, whom I purposefully sought out after hearing her story, heard about the schools from a parent at her child's largely advantaged preschool. When I asked if anyone had ever told her about them or knocked on her door to give her an application, she said, "[They] didn't come and knock on my door because if you would have came and knocked on my door, I would have filled that application out right in front of your face." I asked if she has ever heard of any events in HHA about them. "No, not in the four years that I've been there."

So, although charter school founders and administrators claim that they make extensive efforts to recruit low-income children, the recruitment efforts have not adequately reached low-income families in an understandable way. One founder said, "In my experience as a long-time charter school teacher, the outreach doesn't always reach all of those places . . . outreach and access isn't as clear as intended in charter applications."

Frequently cited as evidence that it is the intention of the charter schools to serve a predominantly middle-class population was the application for the new charter school, DaVinci. The application says, "Many of our students would probably come from within a half-mile of our location, given that the bulk of new three-bedroom construction is in the Northwest area of Hoboken." Here, the founders point out the accessibility for families

who can afford three-bedroom apartments (likely about $1 million) that are being constructed around public housing but not the very close location (within two blocks) of public housing and the children who reside there (Toback, 2012). When asked about this, the DaVinci founder who wrote this paragraph said that this was simply an oversight and pointed to the emphasis in the application on economic integration.

A former district administrator reflected on what happens when children from HHA attend charter schools: "At the charters, the kids who come in from housing with discipline problems, etc., are made to feel weird. They make the families uncomfortable until they pull their children out. I've seen that happen where kids who are bratty leave and go to a charter and then they come back."

It should be noted that the African American HHA mother whom I interviewed whose children attend a charter school (and who works at a university and has a good degree of middle-class capital) was very clear: "The families are very welcoming. My kids get invited to play dates and birthday parties—they are absolutely included. I love the school and family dynamic. I work with one father at the university and, after the school fire, parents would email that they were free and could babysit if needed." She went on to explain that in the aftermath of Super Storm Sandy parents from school texted her—because HHA was one of the last areas to have power restored: "Do you need anything, want to come to shower, want the kids to come sleep over?" When I asked whether advantaged parents are concerned about their children visiting HHA for play dates, she said that her son's best friend lives on Washington Street and visits frequently to play and that his father picks him up.

Nonreasons

When I began this research, I had certain ideas that I thought or heard might influence low-income charter school enrollment. Some potential explanations that I found to be untrue were categorized as "nonreasons" or "not the reasons HHA residents do not apply to charter schools." That is, I found no empirical evidence to support these possible reasons why low-income housing residents do not apply to charter schools, although some advantaged parents speculated that these might be reasons or literature on the topic suggested that they might be valid reasons. These "nonreasons" include that HHA residents do not care about the education of their children, that they are turned off by the philosophy of charter schools, that they are opposed to charter schools, and that the lottery is fixed.

Public housing residents demonstrate a high level of concern about their children's education and make school choices based on the same desires as

advantaged parents. They want the best for their children and families, and they want their children to fit in the school that they attend. There is no evidence for the ideas of a culture of poverty or an urban underclass who do not care about their children's education.

The parents with whom I spoke expressed high aspirations for their children and cared very much about them. As one HHA mother explained,

> I say to my son, "There's a lot of kids in Africa that have no opportunity to go to school." I say to my son, "You're not going to be an exception—many kids wish to have your potential, the opportunity you have. Your father is one example; he didn't finish school. He went to third-grade level, I don't know, maybe lower than that, because he never finished. He had to work since he was 10 years old. Someone took him from the family and put him to work."

Another mother from HHA reflected on how her son could benefit from the gentrification of Hoboken:

> I teach him to strive for better and for more. Some people are more fortunate than others, and I feel like he's more fortunate because I'm a good mom. Not to say that my mom wasn't, but I open his mind and I keep an open mind and I let him know, "Reach for the stars—anything is possible." So I have talks with him that my mom didn't have with me. I let him know that there [are] other opportunities out there; this is not it. Like, Hoboken is not the world—there's a whole world out there that you can see and that you should want to see, and never settle for less. So me telling him these things, I do believe that he can benefit from the changes going on here.

I witnessed many examples of public housing residents advocating for their children's education. Certainly, low-income families have to contend with many circumstances that can influence school decisions. Families may have language barriers, have received subpar educations themselves, have multiple work commitments, lack access or ability to use the Internet for school research, have a history of poor relationships with institutions, or have other personal issues. In addition, lack of access to a car, little disposable income for child care, and inflexible work situations influence school choices. Although participating parents were frequently uninformed or confused about charter schools, this does not indicate a lack of commitment to their children's education. Rather, it points to situations that charter school founders and administrators must understand in trying to create diverse student bodies.

I also found no evidence that the pedagogical philosophy or theme of the charter school was a significant barrier to HHA families applying to charter schools. This was an explanation that I expected to find and one that would have fit nicely into education literature about different types of

parents' pedagogical preferences (Delpit, 1995; Ravitch, 2010). Although some charter school administrators and founders cited this as a possible reason for difficulty in recruiting families from HHA to apply, I did not find any support for this explanation at this time. None of the HHA parents whom I interviewed knew anything about the teaching style of the schools. None described them as being "too laid back" or "progressive."[3] Some said that they had heard that charter schools were, in fact, good schools or even better than the other options, and a few knew of and spoke highly of a private school in town with a pedagogical model somewhat similar to those of the progressive charter schools. One young man from HHA told me that his sister was attending Espagnol because "they wanted my sister to learn Spanish." Luis's mom wanted her son to speak Spanish in school as well. HHA parents would have to know more about these charter schools to be able to make choices based of their pedagogical philosophy and the degree of charter confusion observed negates this.

I also did not find that HHA parents were anti-choice or anti-charter school. As described earlier, there was great confusion about what a charter school is, but no HHA parent expressed a problem with the idea of school choice and charter schools.

A few people with whom I spoke, who were clearly anti-charter school, cited the possibility that charter school lotteries are rigged to keep out low-income children of color and to favor children of the advantaged as a potential explanation for the demographic differences between charter schools and district-run schools. Although investigating these claims was outside the scope of this research, the interviews showed that families in public housing are not applying to charter schools in the first place, so the lottery is not excluding them. The only HHA mother whom I interviewed who had applied to charter schools for her children actually had all of her children accepted into charter schools.

> We got lucky all the way around. My fifth grader got into both [charter schools we applied to] and we then had sibling status. Then two kids got into one of them and three into the other. So we prayed on it and split them up two and two. We knew we had sibling status if spots opened up at the other.

Because of sibling preference, she eventually got all of her children into the charter school that she preferred. Luis's family, the case study family from HHA, was not selected at Espagnol; with a wait-list that year of more than 240 students for his class at that school, that is not unusual. In interviews, charter school leaders adamantly denied the possibility of any kind of dishonesty, cited the transparency of their process, and invited me to observe their lotteries.

Implications

Even though it was not the intention of the founders of charter schools, it is clear that, because of charter school choice, the advantaged parents in Hoboken can use charter schools to avoid the traditional district-run public schools. Other researchers have found that, over time, the parents who choose charter schools founded on inclusionary principles care less about inclusion and philosophy and more about finding a "good school" for their children (DeSena, 2009; Morrison, 2011). As a result, the advantaged do not share their cultural and social capital with young people from low-income backgrounds in Hoboken, and the children of the advantaged do not benefit from Hoboken's socioeconomic and racial diversity. It is also clear that charter schools utilized by the advantaged parents do not appeal to the same student population as the district-run public schools. HHA parents do not choose to apply to charter schools for several reasons. They prefer their neighborhood school, they are confused about what a charter school is, and/or they feel like outsiders at the charter schools. Meanwhile, advantaged parents choose charter schools because they see them to be superior to the district-run public schools and to be places where they and their children will fit in and flourish.

Neoliberal policies that assume that everything, including education, benefits from a market-based strategy have helped to escalate the winner-take-all society. In Hoboken, parents are given a choice among public schools, as well as the option to apply for charter schools. Theoretically, neoliberal school choice should allow all parents to choose the best fit for their children while creating productive competition with the public schools to improve all options. Yet, the choices of HHA residents are constrained and the fact that charter schools are created and used predominantly by advantaged families, combined with charter confusion, has led to the creation of a parallel school system wherein parents *are* choosing what they see as the best fit that they are aware of, but this is not serving all schools well and is preventing school integration and its benefits.

Gentrification has affected education, and in turn education affects gentrification. Creating charter schools as an educational alternative to the district-run public schools has allowed upper-middle-class families to stay in Hoboken, thereby increasing the overall SES of the community and home values—which, in turn, forces out more residents who cannot afford this expensive lifestyle. The upper-middle-class residents see the free preschool system with a choice of locations, a tolerable district-run public elementary school, and most of all, the charter schools in town as real estate benefits. These tuition-free programs allow them to upgrade to million-dollar, three-bedroom apartments (while often leasing out their

previous two-bedroom apartments for high rents) so they can maintain this urban lifestyle longer than previous waves of gentrifiers had even contemplated prolonging gentrification. If these advantaged parents decide at any point that these options are no longer acceptable—usually before their children reach fifth grade, they can choose private schools or move to the suburbs.

The segregative effects of charter schools have been examined in many cities, but the case in Hoboken is rare in that white advantaged parents are creating the charter schools, which serve the advantaged primarily, not low-income children of color. In Hoboken, school choice is increasing gentrification and increasing the income divide in the city. If charter schools are a way for middle-class families to move into and remain in gentrifying or gentrified neighborhoods and avoid the district-run public schools by creating their own schools, the implications are serious. This circumstance encourages expansion of gentrification, while having segregative effects on the district-run schools—or at the very least preventing them from diversifying—and may allow families that might have left for the suburbs to stay in cities and increase reurbanization. If charter schools do not appeal to or do not recruit from low-income populations, they will only continue—as one African American parent noted—"the re-languaging of *Brown v. Board*." Children of color from low-income backgrounds will continue to attend segregated schools despite living in communities where they are in fact socioeconomic and racial minorities.

The founding of charter schools in Hoboken is representative of neoliberal education reform policies that favor the elite. Charter school founders are well-educated people who have the economic, social, and cultural capital to take time away from their careers to devote time to being unpaid founders, often heavily involved in the day-to-day running of the school in some capacity. The only people who can do this easily are those with excess capital, who can harness this capital with ease (and in other locales, large charter management organizations that can rely on large networks and extensive philanthropy from similar types of people; Scott & Holme, 2002). These well-educated, intelligent, talented people can use their connections to start charter schools and to make charter schools function efficiently. This was evident during data collection. When one charter school in town suffered extensive damage from a fire and when another was flooded during Super Storm Sandy, the leadership and parents of these schools found new buildings and supplies swiftly and relatively seamlessly and got the schools up and running again quickly.

Neoliberal school reform policy is reliant on the advantaged to "reform" schools by starting and leading new ones in places such as Hoboken (or in cities where charter schools serve a different demographic, by financing

charter management organizations that start new ones)—and in some places closing schools that are run by paid Department of Education employees (who are often from more diverse backgrounds). As one charter school founder in Hoboken described, these advantaged charter school founders are worker ants for a larger neoliberal cause. This cause has influence on district schools, unionization, and the potential for school integration.

In addition, this "free"-market school choice inherently favors those with extensive social, economic, and cultural capital that can be used to garner philanthropic contributions and community support, while others who attempt to open charter schools will face large and at times insurmountable hurdles (Scott & Holme, 2002). One founder said,

> I think it's really important for people to be integrated and if I were making national policy, which I'm not, or state policy, charter schools are not the way I would go. But it's the tool we have. That's what's available. As parents and educators who want to make a difference, that's the lever that we can move. So we're using the tool that's available, not necessarily because that's the best nationwide policy.

Advantaged parents in Hoboken will continue to be willing to take on the task of starting new schools. As one advantaged mother explained,

> Mile Square High School is several years away from being where it needs to be. It's on its way, but it's not there yet, and you don't have enough people that are willing to take the chance with their children to send them there. I would be willing to do it [start a magnet high school] because I'm an educator and I . . . you could do stuff at home. Should I have to do that? No, but it's like, because I'm aware of it, I could be more involved and really push the envelope.

These advantaged parents who feel entitled to a quality public education see it as easier to start their own schools than to work within the confines of district policies. These advantaged founders of charter schools, with even the best intentions to foster diversity, are white upper-middle-class people with no required training in multicultural education, education policy, culturally responsive pedagogy, or the history, sociology, or philosophy of education. Therefore, they may struggle to create socioeconomic and racial diversity among applicants and keep the best interests of low-income children of color in mind at all times, given their backgrounds, experiences, and personal familial interests.

Neoliberal reforms are causing financial hurdles for the district by expanding charters, meanwhile making district schools appear less

desirable through a laser focus on assessment. At the same time, these forces of neoliberal nonegalitarianism are undermining the social safety net for the low-income, and school choice combined with gentrification is making cities more desirable—and expensive.

Given the experiences described by the advantaged interviewees, it is clear from an education standpoint why advantaged parents make the school choices that they do. There are certainly issues of unacknowledged racism and classism that influence decisions and it can be difficult to understand the extent of these influences. It would be too easy to point only to racism and classism, which historically underlie so much of education and race relations in the United States and are certainly a factor in Hoboken, but the open houses alone demonstrate a clear difference in school atmosphere and student and parent expectations among the schools: (a) At Washington, when advantaged parents visited, the administrator told them that in five years the school could be improved; (b) at a charter school, the administration anticipated the parents' stress about helping their children with homework with a lecture on how they could help in a productive way and a discussion of neurological science; and (c) at a different charter school, the principal presented a detailed presentation on progressivism.

There are certainly also issues of racism and classism at play in school selection in Hoboken. Critical race theory in education stems from critical race theory in law, which argues that laws and policies in this country always favor whites. Critical race theory argues that this is a "racialized society in which discussions of race and racism continue to be muted and marginalized" (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p. 47). Neoliberal school choice policies favor white families in Hoboken, where Washington, the school serving the public housing population, has a history of underperforming and receiving lesser resources.

Advantaged parents do use school choice policy to avoid school integration. Advantaged parents highlight concerns over peer group influence and SES, or allude to fears about students being stabbed in public schools, or have concerns about older children (likely low-income minorities) interacting with their little children at King, but they do not mention any concern and see these types of interactions as a selling point at Dewey. Similarly, advantaged parents are often unwilling even to consider Washington for their children. This confirms what other researchers have found: white parents avoid "black" schools or schools with high poverty rates (Hankins, 2007; Saporito, 2003; Saporito & Lareau, 1999). This attitude has its roots in historical fears of minorities. The only way to combat this type of underlying racism and classism is through integration and exposure. However, like so much of this study, it is complicated. Advantaged parents

and others can point to events that justify their fears, such as the child of one participant who was sprayed with Lysol in class at Washington, the fight at the MSHS girls basketball game, SAT scores at MSHS, and the guest speaker who witnessed students behaving badly at MSHS.

Advantaged parents find charter schools to be the right fit for their families. After climbing four flights of stairs to get to one open house, hearing that the school rents one floor of a clearly not-state-of-the-art building and six rooms in another building and yet will have 200 applicants for approximately 16 openings in the charter school kindergarten, it becomes apparent that facilities are not a pressing concern for advantaged parents. More important to them is what is happening within the school, particularly the curriculum/philosophy, student body, and parental involvement.

When I started to collect data, I found it interesting that advantaged parents applied to three very different charter schools just to avoid the district-run schools. Yet, I discovered in my research that these schools all possess a clear mission that drives the curriculum, faculty, and administration and in which the faculty and parents can invest, and that these three public schools harness the capital of advantaged parents—something that these parents desire. Parents also appreciate that these schools do not seem to simply "teach to the test" or drill students for tests. The curriculum and philosophy of these schools make advantaged parents feel that their children are getting a more demanding and intellectually stimulating education. The extras such as trips to Puerto Rico and after-school chocolate making classes help, too.

What Can Be Done

The case of charter schools in Hoboken is an important one. It is different from many other cities because, as one charter school founder put it, "Everywhere else is all poor kids." However, what has happened in Hoboken will not be an isolated case. Advantaged parents in other areas, even in wealthy suburbs, are already using the same school choice policies to circumvent majority minority schools or to create schools that appeal to their pedagogical tastes. As this continues, the consequences will be far reaching. In Williamsburg, parents who worked hard to create a diverse school at PS 84 were incensed when outside charter management organizations set their sights on their community and appealed to advantage residents. Success Academy Charter, which moved into the neighborhood, has a number of charter schools but the only campus that offers yoga is their Williamsburg site, in a clear attempt to appeal to an advantaged clientele (Kamenetz, 2013).

Several efforts could be undertaken to combat these issues in Hoboken within the current system, including learning from the charters and

working with parents; prioritizing diversity and outreach to HHA parents; utilizing a universal enrollment application; and depoliticizing the conversation.

Learn from the Charters and Work with Parents

Neoliberal school choice is here to stay, at least for now, and the district should learn from the charter schools and embrace one of the original ideas behind charter schools: that they can be laboratories to discover best practices. There should be formal ways for the districts to collaborate beyond simply inviting other school leaders to see their schools. When the charter schools attempt to share best practices with the district, they must also keep in mind that what works there may not work in the district, given the students whom the district is serving. This type of sharing and collaboration must be done without disrespect or condescension from either side and with a deep understanding of the difficulties that the district faces that charter schools do not face.

To end the parallel public school system in Hoboken, the most important piece would be to make the district-run public schools, including Washington (the school that largely serves the public housing population), appeal to advantaged families and to find ways to draw children from Washington into other schools, including charter schools, in the district. The advantaged are drawn to charter schools in a large part for their curriculum. As discussed in chapter 3, magnet programs are needed to appeal to advantaged parents in the district-run public schools. The founders of both Espagnol and DaVinci charter schools would have preferred that their models be incorporated into the district-run schools instead of having to start charter schools, but they faced resistance from the district. The next time a group of advantaged parents with a solid plan expresses a similar interest, the district should give them an opportunity to enact it *in Washington School*.

I spoke to at least two advantaged parents who expressed an interest in starting a magnet school or another charter high school (that appeals to the advantaged). There will certainly be other groups of parents in the future who step forward to try this, and the Board of Education should find ways to work with them. One charter school founder from Espagnol said,

> One thing that everybody remarks on that I know is kind of the rigidity of the public school system here, the fact that when there are problems it's impossible to address them. The administration is very, very unresponsive. One huge selling point for Espagnol, believe it or not, is the food program. There are people who say that they came to Espagnol because we have Revolution

> Foods®, which is an organic, environmentally sustainable food service. Not because their children would be learning everything in Spanish.

DeSena (2009) found in her study of Greenpoint, Brooklyn, that advantaged parents often found it easier to start their own schools than to work within the bureaucracy and red tape of the New York City Department of Education. This is where Hoboken, a mile-square city, has an opportunity to be less rigid and show more flexibility in meeting the needs of the population. The case of the Espagnol parents publicly asking to get involved with planning for MSHS so their students can attend is a good example of room for collaboration and trust building.

Hoboken is a small enough city with enough economic capital to have improved integrated middle-class schools that still feel like neighborhood schools, with the benefits that come with local neighborhood schooling. No more charter schools need to be established in Hoboken at this point. The current three schools have shown that advantaged parents will stay in Hoboken and be committed to their children's schools if they are happy with them. In the future, every effort should be made to involve these parents and those interested in starting new schools in the district-run public schools and to recruit a diverse range of applicants for the charter schools. Creative approaches must be used; an unwillingness to even attempt this is a missed opportunity.

Charters Prioritize Diversity and Diversity Outreach

More active efforts must be made on the part of charter school administrators to recruit persons from various backgrounds to join the founding teams and boards and to become actively involved in the charter schools. Otherwise, the charter schools will continue to have difficulty in appealing to families from low-income public housing. Charter school staff should not give up on recruitment efforts simply because they have waiting lists and sibling preference that limits available spots. Within the current model, the only way that established charter schools will diversify is through purposeful outreach and recruitment of applicants; they could take cues from charter management organizations in other cities that go door-to-door to recruit in public housing and have experienced great success with recruitment. They should also form real collaborations with trusted institutions that work with residents of public housing, not simply list them as supporters. Charter school parents, founders, and leaders should volunteer or continue to volunteer to get to know the children and families who live in public housing and establish mutually beneficial relationships of trust with them if they truly want to create diverse schools.

They should be a presence at all events in the HHA community, and they should be known faces to residents.

Universal Enrollment

Currently, charter schools in Hoboken do not have a legal mechanism to create more integrated schools. Charter school policy was not designed to create diversity; it was designed to give choice, and it has even historically been linked to segregation, not integration. There is no reason these policies could not be changed to allow for diversity creation. Cities such as Newark and New Orleans have moved toward enrollment systems in which parents can select from both district and charter options. While these systems have not been without flaws, they provide a precedent for a new way to legally select charter school students.

This research demonstrates that many low-income families in Hoboken are unaware that charter schools are even an option. If all Hoboken parents were offered one form for applying to kindergarten that listed all charter schools and district schools as options, it would be more obvious that charter schools are an option for parents such as Luis's. It would avoid the influence of social networks on charter confusion and would be a "one stop shop" rather than relying on parents to learn about and get three separate applications for three charter schools with inflexible deadlines that are earlier than those for district enrollment.

This research argues that charter school founders and leaders want more diversity in their schools and are not interested in creating a parallel school system for advantaged children. A system such as the one in Newark, where charter schools must opt into a universal enrollment system, could be an appealing and realistic option in Hoboken. Charter school advocates in Hoboken bristle at accusations of segregation; it would be in their best interest to opt into this system. These universal enrollment systems can also allow for a "fixing of the lottery" so that the number of students with special needs or from low-income backgrounds would be more equally distributed among schools, which would be appealing to district advocates who point out that they serve a different population. Sibling preference would still only allow limited diversity creation in charter schools, but it also would keep the policy from too much backlash among advantaged families. This system would have to be transparent and closely monitored to avoid inconsistencies and fraud.

Depoliticize the Conversation

The conversation surrounding charter and district reform in Hoboken must be depoliticized. School board candidates in Hoboken run on slates

and are affiliated with other politicians in the community. These political affiliations (and the money that comes with them) inevitably bring divisive issues of the larger community into educational issues. Political candidates have sometimes capitalized on dividing charter and district parents. It is difficult to have parents in a mile-square community debating about new charter schools and charter school expansion, but this is understandable when everyone is interested in looking out for their children's best interest. However, school board elections and meetings that are divisive and political do not serve the best interests of any of the students. The pressure and frequency of these politicized elections can also make it challenging for school board members to enact long-term reform or make decisions that are not popular in the short term.

Chapter Six
"The Best Place to Get a Mocha": Issues of Access for Youth in Public Housing in a Gentrified Community

This is Starbucks, the best place to get a mocha, and it's so relaxing in there.
—HHA youth participant, 2012

When I began this research, I expected to find that young people in public housing in Hoboken lived in an isolated environment (on the public housing campus) and rarely frequented the amenities that the advantaged residents frequent. Existing literature in the field led me to this initial hypothesis.

> Though the Villa's [public housing community] isolation from the surrounding South End is not unimaginably extreme, it is unmistakable. A walk along Tremont Street will reveal the presence of Latinos only between the corners of the two streets that bracket the Villa. The hair salons, cafes, restaurants, theaters, bakeries, flower shops, boutiques, and other establishments in the surrounding South End rarely, if ever, see Latino clients, even though there are 3,000 of them within walking distance . . . most . . . adolescents spend nearly all of their time at the Villa [Division in Boston's South End between the gentry and residents of public housing]. (Small, 2004, pp. 99–100)

I expected to tell a tale of public housing residents who, although they can go to such amenities as charter schools, riverside parks, supermarkets, and free cultural events—all valued by advantaged residents—do not do so. Thus, it would have been easy to tie the education and environment findings in this book together. This version would have been a simpler story to tell, one not of access but of not accessing because of feelings of difference and discomfort. However, the data yield a far more complicated and nuanced tale that cannot be tied together as clearly, but there is value in this complexity.

This chapter examines the importance of environment to the health and well-being of youth in public housing, the extent to which youth in public housing in Hoboken have access to and actually enjoy amenities in their town, the obstacles that they face in frequenting amenities, and how athletic fields and sports have become a battleground in the community. The chapter concludes with an examination of how these issues can be resolved.

Environmental Concerns of Youth in Public Housing

Like everyone else, young people are greatly affected by their physical environment. A person's physical environment significantly affects his or her quality of life and health. Researchers such as Loukaitou-Sideris (2003), Bronfenbrenner (1979), Ward (1978), and Lynch (1977) have demonstrated the importance of the physical environment to the lives of children.

Studies of low-income public housing residents have shown that, on average, they experience poorer health, get less exercise, and have less access to supermarkets and fresh healthy food than people who do not live in public housing. Murray et al. (2006) reported that in 2001 there was a life expectancy gap of 20.7 years between the 3.4 million urban black males in high-risk areas and the 5.5 million Asian females in the United States. For 15- to 64-year-old blacks living in high-risk urban areas, the mortality risks are similar to those of sub-Saharan Africa. A black 15-year-old living in a high-risk urban area is 3.8 (males) or 3.4 (females) times as likely as an Asian in America to die before the age of 60. Income inequality is also associated with mortality in the United States and, compared with other developed countries, there are large income differences and significantly lower life expectancies in the United States (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2008).

Youth in public housing in particular are susceptible to certain health risks. For example, low-income, minority, public housing residents have an elevated risk of obesity. Obesity can lead to heart disease, diabetes, arthritis, and premature death. Factors such as the safety of the neighborhood, access to physical activity resources, the availability of unhealthful food and unavailability of healthful food can all lead to an increased risk of obesity. Lack of physical activity can result in chronic diseases, while physical activity can assist in preventing and treating diseases. According to Bennett et al. (2007), lack of physical activity is consistently a problem in low-income neighborhoods. Socioeconomic status is also linked to leisure-time exercise (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2004).

Walking is a form of exercise that is affordable and seemingly possible for most people, but researchers have found minimal rates of walking among public housing residents—even among those who live in walkable urban areas (Heinrich et al., 2007). In a survey of public housing residents

in Birmingham, researchers examined physical activity levels and found that 30 percent of those surveyed reported no participation in any of 13 physical activities during the previous year (Lewis et al., 1993).

In addition, in low-income neighborhoods, where public housing projects are prevalent, there are few healthful eating options. "Disparities in the type and density of food retail outlets have been hypothesized as a possible cause of differential obesity rates across racial/ethnic lines" (Sturm, 2008, p. 681). Many studies have found that low-income families lack supermarket access, which results in higher prices for lesser-quality goods (Powell et al., 2007). Moore and Diaz Roux (2006) concluded that low-income neighborhoods had half as many supermarkets and four times the number of grocery stores as wealthy areas.

Another problem that urban public housing dwellers face with regard to health and leisure-time activity is that urban parks in disadvantaged areas can be sites of drug dealing, gangs, vandalism, and litter. Loukaitou-Sideris (2003, p. 131) argued that urban parks frequently "reinforce divisions based upon class, race, age, or ethnicity."

Public housing residents in Hoboken do not face many of these problems. They do not live in a food desert. In addition to (expensive) farmers' markets and organic groceries, there is a large ShopRite™ and an A & P® store. Depending on where someone lives in the public housing campus, ShopRite is 0.3–0.7 miles away, and A & P is 0.25–0.5 miles away. HHA residents also have direct access to the light rail, which can take them to stores in surrounding areas. For public housing residents in Hoboken, fresh fruits and vegetables are accessible. There are also ample parks and playgrounds; Hoboken is a small, safe, walkable city.

While this study does not measure the effects of gentrification on health, it does examine whether young people from public housing are accessing these types of amenities that could potentially lead to improved health and well-being. The research reported in this book was designed to determine whether youth in public housing and their families take advantage of the supermarkets, accessible parks, and other amenities that should have positive effects on their health and quality of life.

Accessing Amenities

This study adopted multiple strategies to determine whether youth in public housing in Hoboken are isolated and whether they access amenities throughout Hoboken. In addition to being interviewed, the ten youth (eight from HHA main campus public housing and two from subsidized housing), who acted as youth participant researchers, participated in projects about their community. For one of the projects featured in this chapter, they were given

disposable cameras and asked to take pictures of their daily lives in Hoboken and their favorite and least favorite places, which they then captioned.

The findings showed that the users of amenities in Hoboken are more diverse than a visitor might notice at first glance. Youth in public housing are not isolated in the public housing neighborhood. These young people frequent and appreciate the parks in Hoboken; their families go to Washington Street; they love to be near the water; they shop at large supermarkets; they attend the free festivals and events in town; and they utilize the library and public transportation.

Research in the field of gentrification and neighborhood effects leads one to conclude that, when gentrification comes to a community, old-timers, natives, and low-income people of color begin to feel out of place as their establishments are replaced by those of the advantaged. Scholars such as Zukin (2010, p. 3) have argued that Starbucks, specifically, and other such upscale retail establishments represent how the advantaged sector "imposes its own tastes on urban space." "The tastes behind these new spaces of consumption are powerful because they move long-time residents outside their comfort zone, gradually shifting the places that support their way of life to life supports for a different cultural community" (p. 4). The findings in this study suggest just the opposite for Hoboken, supporting the conclusion that young people of color from public housing enjoy the same cultural commodities (such as Starbucks) that the advantaged residents enjoy. In fact, these young people cite Starbucks specifically as an amenity in their community that they enjoy. One teenager from public housing captioned his picture of Starbucks "the best place to get a mocha."

Environmental Advantages of Gentrification

It became evident through observations made in this study and through the youth participant interviews and their photographs, captions, and other projects that living in a gentrified community has several advantages for youth in public housing: supermarkets, parks, free sociocultural events, transportation options, the library, stores, restaurants, and cafes.

Grocery Shopping

Across the street from the HHA main campus is the type of small local market (with check cashing services) that is frequently criticized in public health research for being overpriced and less healthful than a large supermarket. Although HHA families and the youth themselves often shop at this market, all interviewed HHA residents reported that they did the majority of their shopping at large supermarkets such as ShopRite or A & P

in Hoboken or even BJ's in Jersey City. There was no evidence that public housing residents do not use these supermarkets. They utilize the local market between supermarket shopping trips in the same way that many advantaged residents utilize their expensive corner organic store between supermarket shopping trips.

One teenager's photographs and captions indicate the role that this market plays in his family and his community: "This is a picture of the market. I took the picture because my family buys some groceries there." Another teenager's photographs and captions show that her family uses both types of stores. Although she likes the convenience of the market, she wrote that her mother shops at A & P. Large supermarkets are frequently unavailable for public housing residents in highly disadvantaged neighborhoods, but they are available and used by public housing residents in Hoboken.

Parks

Hoboken has four large parks, as well as several other small parks, public walkways, and piers along the Hudson River. These parks are safe and clean and utilized with great frequency by the advantaged residents. Many of these parks are being renovated, either directly or indirectly, as a result of being part of a gentrified community. During data collection, a renovation of Church Square Park was financed through a city bond and $50,000 from the Project Play Initiative, which was launched by the Hoboken Family Alliance, a group of advantaged parents (offshoots of an earlier version of this group was responsible for starting the town's first two charter schools, discussed in chapter 5). A description of the founding of this organization demonstrates the role of the advantaged in the upkeep of the parks and playgrounds and the political economy of place in a gentrified community.

> It's a beautiful spring day at Liberty State Park in May 2009. Zabrina Stoffel and Regina Gannon watched with delight as their young children played safely together. They liked the state-of-the-art equipment and the areas that encouraged creative thinking . . . An idea was formed . . . why not bring this type of park to Hoboken? The two women approached the city of Hoboken with their concept . . . They learned about the latest in playground design which included environmentally sustainable building materials. The City Council's Parks and Recreation subcommittee was impressed with all their work and encouraged them to keep moving forward. (Hoboken Family Alliance, 2013, para. 1–2)

When the renovations to Church Square Park did not satisfy all parents in the community, a group of preschool parents petitioned the mayor and city council to add equipment for preschool aged children. Within a matter

of weeks, they were given notice that the additions would be made to the newly renovated playground. The additions were completed soon after.

Despite advantaged residents' prominent role in the building, upkeep, and use of parks and playgrounds, these spaces are utilized frequently by youth in public housing. All of the youth from HHA who were interviewed reported that they utilized these parks; many cited them as their favorite locations in town. "My favorite place, I guess that would be the park on the Hudson River because, I don't know why, I just feel so relaxed there. I just look at the water, and sometimes there's not a lot of people around. So it's a good place to think." Another teenager said, "Yeah, the one near the Hudson River. My friends just like to go there just to look at the skater boys because they're so hot. But not me, I just go there just to see them skate." An HHA mother shared, "We try to go to all the parks that they have here." When asked whether she sees benefits to gentrification and the changes that have come to Hoboken, she said,

> Definitely beneficial. I see a lot of condos coming up around a lot of old buildings or places I remember [were] knocked down and condos replaced, which I'm OK with that. But also they've put up a lot of parks so it's not all about condominiums, they've done a lot of things for kids too. So I'm OK with that.

Youth from public housing also enjoy the public piers. One told me about a favorite spot: "The piers. They're very tranquil when it's just a quiet sunny day, because then you get that kind of ocean breeze, you get to see the boats and the helicopters. You can see New York, and during the sunset it's really beautiful. So it's pretty nice." Another young person said that she and her friends like to "lay on the grass." One teenager said, "I like Pier C by the water. I usually play there all the time, even though I'm like, 17, I feel like a little girl." As one father of a daughter who lives in HHA explained, "I go by the river with her. It's better than over here [HHA campus]."

The parks and piers are places for children, youth, and families from different racial/ethnic backgrounds to play and interact. Many advantaged parents described the parks as diverse places where their children play with children from different backgrounds. Luis's mom, like others in public housing, pointed out how much her family enjoys the parks and piers throughout Hoboken. She said that they do not use the playgrounds in public housing, "First of all, because I know they're dirty. Realistically speaking there are drug addicts in the projects. I don't know what's there." This does not limit their play options, since they use the other parks and piers in Hoboken.

Issues sometimes arise. Advantaged parents have commented to me about the parks being filled with "ghetto" children at certain times or have

expressed annoyance on Internet sites about "their language" or use of water balloons in the summer. This is two sided, of course. Luis's mother commented on the behavior of advantaged children in the park and confrontations that she has had with advantaged parents in local parks.

> I feel that I'm not gonna get into an altercation with a parent because a lot of these people don't have that discipline with their children. I'm more like, my kids know, don't act up in public, you don't hit other people, you respect. A lot of these kids don't and, if the child does something to my child . . . It's a white child, and I'm the Puerto Rican mom . . . And it's like, where did you come from? I've had problems in parks before. Like, my son will take a toy to the park, my son wants it back, the mom gets upset because she says, "Well, you're not supposed to bring toys to the park." I was like, you know what, Luis, let's go.

Despite tensions that sometimes rise to the surface, the photographs that the teenagers took of their daily lives demonstrate the importance of

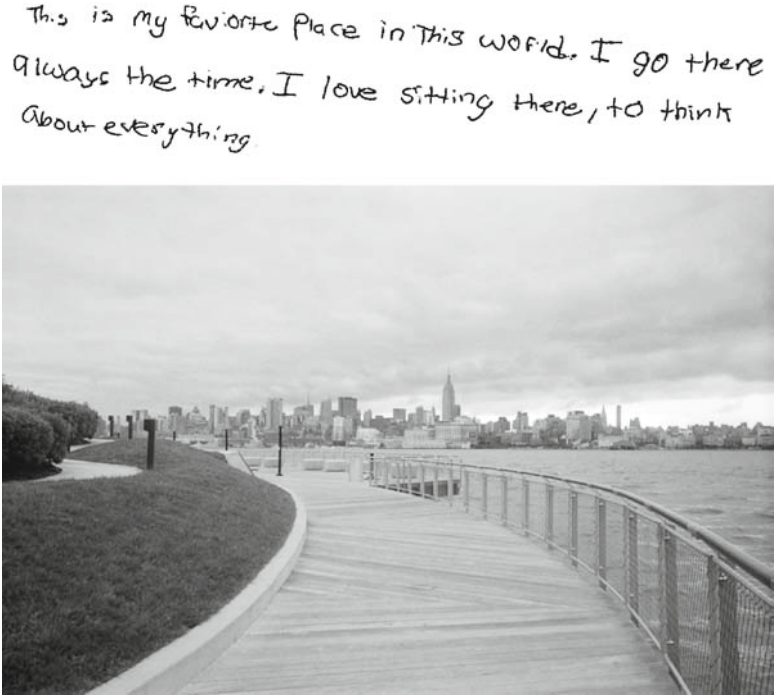


Image 6.1 Youth photograph pier, Hoboken.

parks to them and show no hint of discomfort. All of the HHA teenagers who completed the photography project took pictures of two or more parks in Hoboken that are not located on the public housing campus. These findings are also significant because youth from public housing are not only going to the parks and playgrounds and fields around public housing and the park right next to their high school; they are also frequently going to Church Square Park,[1] centrally located in Hoboken, and the parks on the waterfront—far from public housing. These are the same public spaces that the advantaged residents told me they frequent in Hoboken.

One teenager took photographs of two parks in Hoboken: one a centrally located park (Church Square Park) and the other a pier over the Hudson (image 6.1). Another took photographs of two parks in Hoboken, as well as a war memorial on the waterfront (his Fourth Street Park picture is image 6.2).

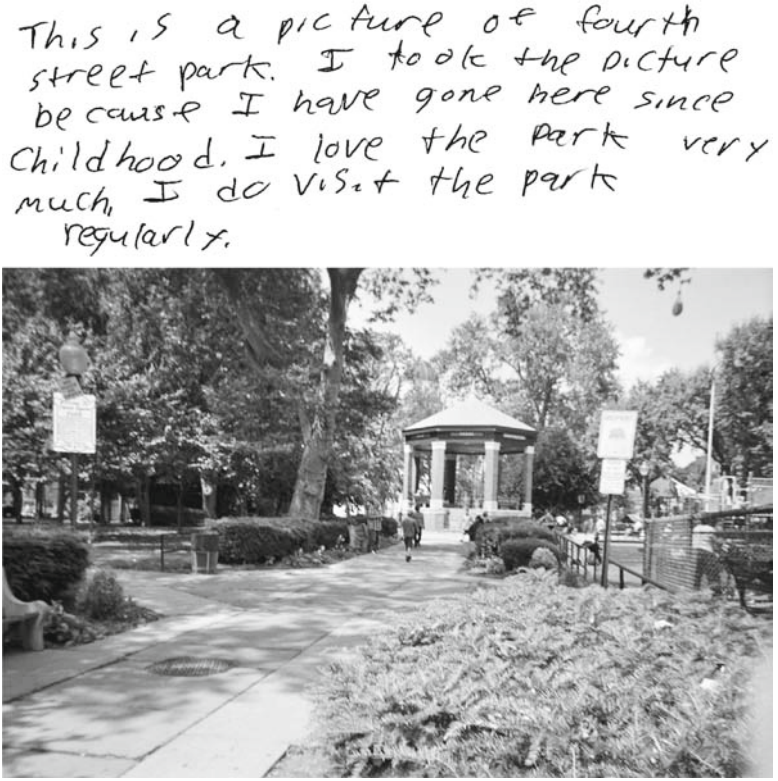


Image 6.2 Youth photograph park, Hoboken.

One teenager's picture of Columbus Park is captioned, "I think Columbus is a fun place to go." Another teen took pictures of two parks in town and commented that he enjoys being able to swing at the park, so the park with swings is his favorite. Another described the walkway along the Hudson River that she photographed as "the most relaxing place in Hoboken. Anytime I can, I go there." She also captioned a nearby park, "It has a lot of trees. I feel so refresh when I sit at a bench and I just think. It is really a special place. I have also hanged there with my friends and just had a great time." The only teenager to take a picture of recreational space within the public housing campus also took pictures of Columbus Park (image 6.3) and Fourth Street Park outside of HHA and labeled "4th Street Park, my chill spot."

The visual data demonstrate that the parks and piers in Hoboken are enjoyed by youth from public housing. They clearly have regular access to clean, safe parks—something that far too many young people from public housing in isolated urban locales do not have (Loukaitou-Sideris, 2003).

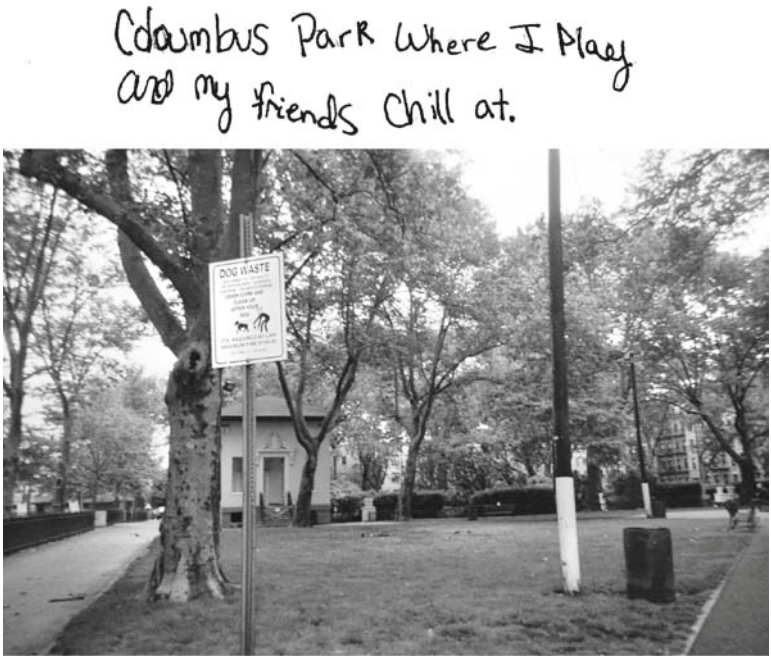


Image 6.3 Youth photograph park, Hoboken 2.

This access to parks and to clean and safe recreational areas should contribute to the health of young people and combat obesity and related health problems while allowing youth from different backgrounds to interact.

Events

> The Arts and Music Festival is crowded as it is a beautiful day in Hoboken. The street is full of people drinking mango and blueberry flavored lemonade, eating fried Oreos, gyros, pizza, and corn. The smell of basil from a pizza oven nearby fills the air. The festival is full of children and dogs. It is very diverse with people from a wide variety of ethnic, cultural, age, and socioeconomic backgrounds. Behind my table is a huge slide and children's band. Young attractive White women walk by with painted signs to hang on their apartment walls that say "Hoboken."
>
> While most of the people who stop by to sign up for the run to benefit the Center fit the typical yuppie profile, a few do not. One Black teenage male in a du-rag takes a signup sheet, along with an older Black man wearing a NY Waterways uniform and a middle-aged Black mother of a teenage boy. The atmosphere is festive, and everyone seems to get along well on the crowded streets. I notice in just a few minutes a labradoodle, poodle, and cockapoo walk by. One woman is carrying her small white dog in what appears to be a baby carrier.
>
> —Field Notes, May 2011

The many free and safe sociocultural events that take place in town are another advantage to living in a gentrified community. There are movie nights under the stars, exercise classes on the pier, concerts, Shakespeare in the park, harvest festivals with petting zoos, Italian festivals, and arts and music festivals. Most of these events take place on Washington Street or along the waterfront. These types of events are not as feasible or common in isolated predominantly low-income communities as they are in a gentrified community, with its level of public safety and economic, social, and cultural capital.

When I first conducted field observations at these events, I found them to be decidedly geared toward, and dominated by, the advantaged residents. However, as I got to know the HHA community, I began to notice residents from public housing at these events. I came to realize that because Hoboken is a gentrified community with only 11 percent of residents below poverty level, advantaged residents must necessarily dominate most events in town. But that did not mean that low-income public housing residents were not in attendance. Interviews with both youth and parents in public housing confirmed these observations. The teenagers and many of the parents take advantage of the variety of free cultural and educational opportunities in Hoboken.

When asked about attending the arts and music festival on Washington Street, one teenager said,

> I do because they usually have a lot of interesting things there, like food from Argentina, which I saw at this Music and Art festival. And bands that no one's probably ever heard of. So it's interesting to actually hear that at the Music and Art Festival in Hoboken, because you wouldn't expect that from a small area like this.

One teenager remarked, "Oh yeah, usually I participate in them [arts and music festivals] and like to volunteer for like little face painting and tattoos and stuff." Another teenager commented about summer movies and concerts in the park: "I've been to those, those are really, really fun." The fireworks made an impression on another teenage participant, who said, "I went to the fireworks; it was beautiful. This year I'm going to go to like one of the movies or the concerts." The food at these events was a common positive theme for several of the teens. "The foods are good, good food," said one teen, describing her best memories. Another commented specifically, "Usually I go for the food. They have zeppoles, I think they're called? The little buns and powder?" Parents from the HHA were similarly appreciative of these events: "Oh [my son] loves that [free movie nights outside]. Oh yes, the concerts are very good for the summer. Thank goodness they have all these little programs free. Sometimes I go and observe the exercise."

These events in Hoboken provide another space for copresence and common experience. They create an opportunity for young people from public housing to leave their immediate neighborhood and encounter cultural experiences and attain cultural capital alongside advantaged residents. As one of the teenagers put it, "Like, everybody comes together."

Restaurants, Cafes, Stores, and the Library

Based on the literature about gentrification, I anticipated that the youth from public housing would feel uncomfortable in and around many of the retail establishments on the main thoroughfare, Washington Street. I asked all interviewees about favorite and least favorite places in Hoboken and about any places that they did not like or where they did not feel comfortable—and why. All said that they enjoyed the amenities on or near Washington Street and frequently walked on Washington Street. They are teenagers, and they tend to favor such establishments as Johnny Rockets®, McDonald's®, Ben and Jerry's®, 7-Eleven®, and Benny Tudino's Pizzeria, but they also frequent Carlo's Bakery (and love the red velvet cupcakes), Cold Stone Creamery™, Hoboken Bar and Grill, Starbucks, Rita's, American

Apparel, Ricky's NYC, and other establishments frequented by advantaged residents. One teenager said,

> [When I] just, like, need to air out and, like, take a deep breath and just walk around, I would just walk around Hoboken. Like me and my friends would just go by the water maybe, just go into a store and look around; like, just calm ourselves down. It's a place that you can just get out and walk because it's not far from your house. Everything is just there.

Another teenager said, "Washington Street is always fun." One teenager articulated the difference in dining options on Washington Street as opposed to those in the plaza near public housing: "I love to go eat there; a lot of interesting food besides Chinese food and pizza." During the photography research, all youth participants took photographs of restaurants, cafes, or stores on or near Washington Street.

When I asked one participant about feeling uncomfortable in any restaurants, the participant said, "Not restaurants, because I'm pretty sure the employees and the owners want to keep a friendly business. So they'd want you to feel as comfortable as possible." One of the teenage participants said that she sometimes feels like people stare at her, which is uncomfortable, but she claimed not to care. She said, "I go everywhere in Hoboken." When I probed and asked her about places where she would not go or might feel particularly uncomfortable, she said, "Probably sushi stores, because I don't like sushi. I really don't like sushi." This, the only evidence of discomfort that I found from all the HHA youth, demonstrates the level of comfort that the young people from public housing feel as they move within the culture of commodity frequented by the advantaged residents and the cultural capital attained living in a gentrified community. Although she did not like sushi, the sushi restaurant was clearly not exclusively the realm of the advantaged residents. These findings differed from those reported by Perez (2004), who found that young male public housing residents felt discriminated against and stigmatized by business owners.

The youth participants' photographs demonstrate that they frequented commercial outlets on or near Washington Street (images 6.4 through 6.6). Many took pictures of four or more restaurants, cafes, shops, and bakeries. Of Carlo's Bakery, one wrote simply "the best cupcake ever" and of a local bar/grill another wrote, "The food is soo good." Starbucks was photographed as well. One of the captions reads "Starbucks! I love vanillia frappes." Washington Street, the main thoroughfare in town, is clearly a place where youth from public housing feel at ease, not just hanging out but also shopping and consuming alongside advantaged residents.

The picture is the Guitar Bar Jr. which sells guitars, bass guitars, and other musical instruments. I chose to take a picture of it because I bought both of my guitars from there. I really enjoy this place, especially when I take lessons there. I visit this place every week once to take lessons.

Image 6.4 Youth photograph amenities on Washington Street, Hoboken.

The teenagers also took photographs of the library, which is located on Church Square Park in central Hoboken. Although one participant took a picture of the library and captioned it, "I do not like this public library because it's kind of small and the employes [*sic*] are always mean," the others expressed positive feelings about it. One captioned her photograph, "This is the picture of the public library. I love reading, so I hang out there most of the time." Another wrote that she uses the computers there. The Hoboen library is centrally located and open seven days a week with hours until 8:00 pm three nights a week and 9:00 pm one night a

This is starbucks the best place to get a mocha and it's so relaxing in there.

Image 6.5 Youth photograph amenities on Washington Street, Hoboken 2.

Starbucks! I love Vanilla Frappes.

Image 6.6 Youth photograph amenities on Washington Street, Hoboken 3.

week. Convenient access to a library, reading materials, computers, and the Internet are very important to urban, low-income students in light of the achievement gap and the digital divide.

Transportation

Hoboken has many transportation options such as New Jersey Transit busses, the PATH train, NY Waterway ferries, and New Jersey Transit Trains, but public housing residents frequently cited the Hudson-Bergen light rail and the Hop shuttles that are convenient to public housing as positive changes that have come to Hoboken with gentrification. Youth use the light rail to get to and from the mall in Jersey City or Central Avenue, and parents use it to get to stores in other cities for shopping. As one HHA mother explained, the light rail is "closer for me to go to the mall" (the Newport Centre Mall in neighboring Jersey City).

The light rail stops are adjacent to the western side of public housing at Second Street and Ninth Street in southwest Hoboken (as well as the main transportation terminal by the Hudson River). Both are convenient for residents of public housing. Residents in public housing can use the light rail to get to their destinations or take the light rail to the Hoboken terminal, where they can take PATH trains, ferries, and New Jersey Transit trains. The light rail in southwest Hoboken also brings foot traffic to this area of Hoboken, decreasing its physical isolation. As one HHA resident in the focus group noted, Hoboken is "improving. Since I've been here, it has improved, like, the baseball fields, got better. There's less violence and stuff, which is great. And even better transportation because of the light rail." Another HHA mother said, "The light rail is fine, it's great . . . immensely [happy when the light rail came]. My son is like a fan of the light rail."

The Hop ($1 shuttle buses that run throughout Hoboken), which began in 2010, has opened access to all of Hoboken for public housing residents who are unable to walk everywhere or prefer not to do so. The Hop is part of the move toward environmental sustainability and is intended to reduce the density of cars on the streets of Hoboken. Along with more bike lanes and car-sharing programs, the Hop is meant to discourage residents from owning cars (Motavalli, 2010). The program, which is directed toward improving the environment and reducing the parking problems in Hoboken, benefits public housing residents. Aside from increasing access to nearby amenities, it provides access to additional transportation to places of employment, which is important to low-income workers. Lack of transportation is often cited as a reason that many urban public housing residents in isolated areas are unable to seek and maintain employment (Wilson, 1997). One HHA mother said, "I constantly have to

walk through Washington Street most of the time I try. Thank goodness that they have the Hop . . . That's a major change. It's simple for me just to grab . . . I think it's marvelous what the mayor has done."

Problems with Access

Despite these advantages, young people in public housing in Hoboken still face challenges to enjoying amenities in town. The stores, restaurants, and cafes are expensive and frequently geared toward higher-income advantaged clientele. When asked whether they shop for clothing in Hoboken, almost all of the young adults in the focus group replied that they do not. As one young woman said vehemently, "No! They don't have my size in Hoboken." Her friend concurred, "They be having the cutest things on Washington Street but they don't have my size." And someone else in the focus group said, "That happens a lot, they don't have plus sizes. Y'all people [gentry] are skinny, I'm sorry."

When asked where their families like to go for sit-down dinners, most public housing residents reported going to Jersey City, Elizabeth, Newark, West New York, Weehawken, or other neighboring communities because of the better prices and greater selection. They also shop for home goods and children's clothes outside of Hoboken. An HHA mother explained, "Hoboken really has not been known for, like, clothes. I mean, they're starting to put more stores up on Washington or whatever, but they're expensive. Like, a baby sweater might be $40. Like, seriously, they're going to grow out of that, and I'm not paying 40 bucks."

Another HHA mother reflected on changes in Hoboken: "I think with them tearing down them department stores and everything up there I think that was, like, not a good thing, because now people have to go outside of Hoboken to shop." A mother from HHA said, when asked about going out to eat, "Not really. I mean, Hoboken is so little, depending where you go it could be a little pricey, so if it's not Dominoes or like the Chinese spot around the corner, we don't go."

One teenage participant who said that she enjoys the festivals in town pointed out, however, "Sometimes it's pretty pricey, though. I saw like the prices and was like, 'Whoa you're charging that much for a painting?'"

Another issue is knowledge of events and opportunities in town. One mother in public housing, when asked whether the public housing community was separate from the rest of Hoboken, replied,

> In some sense it is, because, like, if there's activities going on on Washington, you never see any posters down here, there are only posters up there. Say, like, for the art and music festivals, there's never any posters about that

> down here. You'll see it maybe by the train station or by City Hall, like, on the glass door of my work place or whatever, but you'll never see any posters about anything that's going on up there, so in a sense, yeah, it is.

Luis's mother also shared this sentiment that HHA residents lack information about opportunities such as sports and schools, because of where they live.

The Invasion of Mama Johnson Field

> They are taking basketball time for indoor soccer. It is not even soccer season . . . The mayor's son plays soccer.
>
> —Interview, October 2012

In addition to problems related to affordability and advertising of events to the HHA community, access to athletic fields and recreational spaces has become a battleground for both the youth and the adults in Hoboken, largely because space is at a premium. Hoboken is a small city with not enough athletic fields; two were under construction during data collection. So when any one group is using a ball field, another group is likely without one, leading to tensions between the advantaged and youth from public housing.

Mama Johnson Field is an example of a contested area between advantaged and public housing residents. The field is located on the public housing campus and is flanked on three sides by public housing buildings. In 2004, the field was named for an HHA matriarch, the late Mary Elizabeth Johnson, who was a resident, softball player, and housing activist passionate about ensuring that the children of Hoboken had opportunities for safe recreation (Addeo, 2005).

In addition to being used by the city and school athletic teams, the field is rented to Zog Sports and ABL Sports, coed social sports leagues that attract yuppies who play softball, dodge ball, kickball, or other sports. These groups are highly recognizable, walking around Hoboken in large groups with matching T-shirts and frequenting their sponsoring bars or taverns. They are also highly recognizable to the youth in public housing. One young man said of the recent renovations to the field,

> The [redevelopment of Mama Johnson Field] baseball field, that's good. They're doing that; I don't want to say 100 percent for the kids of the projects, 50 percent. The other 50 percent is for them [yuppies], so they can have somewhere to play, because I'm pretty sure they didn't like the way it was looking or how it was going when they were playing kickball down here.

HHA residents, particularly young men of color, expressed resentment that the police "hassle" them for trespassing in public housing, while yuppies are allowed to walk freely there. One young man commented, "Yeah, you get knocked for trespassing for everything you do. If I walk from my building to another one, then that's trespassing because I have to be signed in to that building . . . I see yuppies walking through, and they don't get harassed." Another focus group participant agreed, "If you see a black guy, forget about it. They'll get pulled over quick." One Latino father whose daughter lives in HHA said that the police give him a "hard time" for trespassing when he is picking up his daughter. A few public housing residents also complained about hypocrisy, citing that yuppies come into public housing for drugs and "intimacy." These findings are in line with research about gentrification in other cities, such as that by Perez (2004), who found that police harassed Puerto Rican longtime residents in a gentrified community in Chicago.

Young adults in Hoboken public housing consider the way residents are treated with respect to Mama Johnson Field to be similarly hypocritical. One young adult male said, "I don't like the fact that we've actually got to get permission to use that. I don't like that . . . Not always. Not until the 'yuppie' leagues started [playing there]." Another public housing resident in the focus group disagreed with him, saying, "Well, I agree with them locking it up because how some of them act it needs to get locked up . . . They just cut the ribbon, and now one part of the gate is already ripped open so you can climb under and go inside." The young man quickly countered, "Maybe if it was open, they wouldn't have to make another passageway for them to get inside. So none of the gates would have been ripped." Adults who work with youth in public housing concurred. "They [HHA youth] aren't allowed to play on their own fields anymore." Yet the HHA rents Mama Johnson field to pay for resident services that, thanks to neoliberal policies, are no longer government funded.

There is a distinct sense from HHA residents that the yuppies have taken over many of "their" spaces in the city. When I asked the young adults in the focus group where they would hang out when they were in middle school and high school, the following discussion about the Boys and Girls Club, which now houses Espagnol Charter School, ensued:

Participant 6: The Boys & Girls Club.
Participant 7: Yeah, but then they kicked us out of there.
Participant 7: We would play basketball and then the yuppie squads would come and play dodge ball or use the gym when we're playing basketball. And then they wonder why we go out on the streets and start trouble, when we had a place to go before, you understand?

Participant 2: That makes no sense.
Participant 5: But that's no reason to start trouble.
Participant 7: Not start trouble, but, you know…
Participant 5: They're bored, they want to do something.
Participant 2: You bored and you want to do something, go play basketball on the basketball court out here.
Participant 7: Then they kick us out when we do that. "Oh, you got a curfew." We [are] grown.

Tensions related to athletics and spaces are most evident when the sports are segregated. One sport in which segregation between advantaged youth and public housing youth is perceived is soccer. Advantaged youth often participate in soccer from a very young age; many day care providers offer it for one-year-olds and up. Luis's mother described how she put her older child in soccer in fourth grade, but he quit after the first day because, "He's not experienced like the other kids who have been in soccer since they were like 3" and she says he was made fun of. One African American mother said, "The sports are segregated, too. Sports are all segregated. Soccer is White, only five kids of color. You have to sign up online, no massive advertising, there are traveling teams, etc. Football, you sign up manually, but it is all Black. Baseball is not as yuppie as soccer, more born-and-raised Hoboken Whites."

On the other hand, an advantaged charter school father who coaches soccer said that the soccer teams are "totally diverse because they're so cheap." But then he gave an indication of the potential for greater diversity when he said that, when the newly renovated Mama Johnson field opens,[2]

> I think they're about to get more diverse, too, once we start using that field. Then the kids that don't leave the area will say, "Oh, I want to play that." As a matter of fact, the other coach I coach with was like, "You know, we don't do enough of tapping into the community back there. They deserve to play, and they're probably really good athletes." So with that field there, I think that we'll probably get all those kids to participate.

An African American advantaged mother said that her daughter is playing soccer, and "there's nobody, there are very few kids, if at all, there are very few kids of color playing soccer in this Hoboken soccer league. And they're like, 'Well, Black kids don't play soccer' and I was like 'I did, I was an All American in high school.'"

Mayor Dawn Zimmer, considered a yuppie, and her administration are alleged by some residents with whom I spoke to favor soccer over other sports. DeSena (2009) reported that soccer in other gentrified communities

is seen as a segregated sport. In Greenpoint, Brooklyn, the children of the advantaged do not participate in community-sponsored sports, and their parents instead formed a separate youth soccer league.

Although youth from public housing experience advantages in terms of amenities because of gentrification, they also feel that they have lost space in their community. In particular spaces that previously provided supports or opportunities and for which they felt a degree of ownership and comfort such as the Boys and Girls Club or the playing field. Both of these changes are representative of neoliberal nonegalitarianism influencing their lives through education and housing policy.

Implications

In contrast to most of the gentrification literature, which presents neighborhood change in an almost wholly negative way (Zukin, 2010) and argues that gentrifiers and old-timers inhabit different spaces in cities (Small, 2004), the empirical evidence from this study shows that public housing residents in Hoboken feel comfortable and entitled to utilize the spaces of consumption used by advantaged residents. For them, Starbucks does not represent gentrification and exclusion; it is just a place where they can get a great mocha or frappe. Unlike Small, who found that middle-class residents had distinctly separate public spaces, restaurants, and shopping from public housing residents, public housing residents and the advantaged in Hoboken share many of these spaces. Parks, playgrounds, cultural events, the library, and modes of transportation are all readily available and accessed by youth in public housing in Hoboken.

The environment findings in this study contrast in a way with the findings about education. Regarding education, HHA residents make choices very differently from advantaged residents and, as a result, the schools are largely segregated. Gentrification has not benefitted the education of low-income children of color because in school they are not valued customers. Low-income children of color suffer from historically subpar educational experiences and from an achievement gap. Their parents' social and cultural capital and even parenting styles are not rewarded by the school system (Lareau, 2003). Thus, a school system based on the free market puts them at a disadvantage. However, in terms of environment, neoliberalism (and with it, corporatized government-backed gentrification) has led to establishment of consumer outlets in their community that HHA residents want to access and that they enjoy. If they have the money to buy a mocha, their money is as good as the money of the advantaged, and they are welcomed as consumers of expensive coffee (or ice cream, sushi, or red velvet cupcakes). In this way, low-income youth of color benefit from

neighborhood change because they have access to and enjoy amenities of their choice, which they have the right to enjoy, as well as the social capital that comes with this exposure.

Those who overstate the cultural divide surrounding gentrification have overstated the discomfort felt by these residents. They stereotype "the other" and thereby do a disservice to their own agendas. Arguing that gentrification brings amenities that appeal only to the advantaged is stereotyping. Many low-income residents of color will appreciate these new amenities and have the same tastes as gentrifiers. Along with gentrification comes benefits for those low-income residents who remain (if public housing remains).

Yet the money of these low-income residents spent on such amenities is going back into the corporatization of American cities, and their cost of living will continue to increase. As Freeman (2006, p. 208) explained in his study of gentrification in Harlem, "It is the Starbucks owner who reaps the financial rewards." For youth in public housing, their residency in Hoboken is secure because of their affordable public housing; however, if their families are pushed out of public housing for any reason, or when they grow up and are ready to move out on their own, they may not be able to afford to live in Hoboken as the cost of living continues to increase.

Political economy of place demonstrates that with the gentrification of communities come improved services and public amenities. For public housing residents, the middle-class cultural and social capital of their neighbors, who fight to improve parks and playgrounds and transportation options and to have free cultural and seasonal events in Hoboken, provides real advantages. These parks are public, located throughout Hoboken, and fully accessible to public housing residents, who take advantage of them. As the neighborhoods gentrify, crime decreases, making all of these amenities more accessible to youth in public housing. However, with these changes comes the loss of spaces that they see as "their own," such as Mama Johnson Field and the Boys & Girls Club. The advantaged can harness their power to benefit their own children (and the sports that they choose to play) at the expense of youth from public housing.

In addition, neoliberal nonegalitarianism, which shrinks the web of social supports available for low-income residents and increases the power of the advantaged, necessitates actions such as renting athletic fields to fund decreased resident services in public housing and building charter schools started by advantaged residents within nonprofit spaces. Family gentrification and neoliberalism in cities leads to situations in which policies such as charter schools can be used to keep the wealthy and prolong gentrification in the process, doing little to benefit those with less capital.

What Can Be Done

When it comes to the environmental experiences of young people in public housing in Hoboken, the news is not all bad. Their access to middle-class capital and amenities is atypical for youth in low-income housing. Yet there are areas in need of improvement, and there is potential for positive change.

Maintain SES Diversity through Housing Policy

It is essential that housing policy maintain socioeconomic diversity in gentrifying communities. Rather than demolishing public housing to create better health and social environments for low-income public housing residents, public housing policy should allow them to stay in the significant numbers that traditional public housing projects provide. This is possible only with ample funding to improve and sustain public housing in its current form. If these residents can remain in neighborhoods that are gentrifying, the social and cultural capital of advantaged residents will improve their living situations in the same way that deliberately created mixed-income developments would. If they are moved, or their housing becomes mixed-income, the evidence shows that their social and cultural capital and networks will become disorganized.

When large public housing projects are torn down, many residents are displaced. In Hoboken, they would then not reap the benefits of improved neighborhood amenities; thus, gentrification would continue unchecked. If public housing residents are given housing vouchers to "improve their living situations," they will be forced to leave gentrifying communities and move to majority minority neighborhoods without the amenities and safety that they would have had in a gentrified community. If they are housed in mixed-income developments alongside the advantaged, without large numbers of public housing residents, more affordable places such as the Big Banner Restaurant, the "Chinese store," and other local amenities that they still frequent will likely not survive; instead, the residents will be faced with more expensive stores.

Mixed-income communities displace the most at-risk members of the community and reduce the diversity of the city. They also make it more difficult for public housing residents to come together in support of the social services and amenities that they desire or need. The proposed Vision 20/20 Plan in Hoboken calls for creation of a mixed-income neighborhood that would in part increase access to shops, healthy food, and employment and be transit oriented. However, the findings of this research show that the neighborhood already fits this description. While more of this would

certainly be beneficial, the downside must be fully examined before a plan is implemented.

Instead of bemoaning the opening of Starbucks in gentrified communities as the death of authentic urban places (Zukin, 2010), the focus should be on maintaining the diversity of urban residents through housing. In a gentrifying community, there are few ways to stop the free market and the high-end corporate amenities that it brings. However, federal housing policy does not have to support gentrification by tearing down public housing and allowing unbridled gentrification. Public housing in places such as Hoboken and New York City is the only thing standing in the way of a complete realization of the neoliberal urban agenda. Public housing in its current form should be funded and housing authority directors and politicians should not have to choose solely between tearing it all down and rebuilding or letting it deteriorate while the residents remain.

Incentivize and Prioritize Spaces for Youth Activities

If low-income youth in Hoboken are left without space to play sports, which causes friction in the community, space for youth sports should be prioritized. Along with requirements for open space and low-income housing set-asides, all developers should be required to include recreational public space for the community. Residents of Hoboken have long clamored for an outdoor swimming pool, which would be an additional way to integrate the youth of Hoboken through recreational, healthful play. Such an amenity could be required of developers who are eager to build in Hoboken. If this pool featured city-sponsored affordable swim lessons, like other city-sponsored activities (art in the park, yoga), it could also be an opportunity for diversity in youth activities. This would give children like Luis, who do not have rooftop pools like Olivia, the chance to learn a valuable life skill. While conducting research, I heard about a new luxury building that was considering including public basketball courts but the neighbors expressed concerns over "whom it would attract." These are the inevitable issues that will arise in a community with socioeconomic diversity but should not be barriers to creating the basketball court and other spaces for diverse youth network formation.

School Integration for Integrated Networks

Fair and equitable answers to questions of who plays soccer and who has access to recreational space and when it is available can be answered only through school integration. Youth in Hoboken must learn from one another and form meaningful relationships, which will be achieved only if they are

not segregated for the majority of the day. Copresence of advantaged youth and HHA youth now occurs in parks, which function as healthy common spaces, but the people who were interviewed for this study said that youth meet the majority of their friends in school. To achieve integration across groups, integrated schools are needed, in addition to integrated parks and amenities.

Chapter Seven

Separate, Different, but Not Isolated: How Youth in Public Housing Relate to Their Gentrified Community

For some reason there's this stereotype that "Oh, it's bad in there [Hoboken public housing]," and "Nobody wants to go near that place." I sort of feel like there's a wall between the projects and then the other people. It's sort of funny, don't you think? Because here's the projects and then all of a sudden there's nice houses, and so I guess I pretty much feel they don't want to go there and it's a bad place and they don't want their kids to hang out there.

—Youth participant, June 2012

There is a separation between residents of Hoboken public housing and the rest of the community. This chapter investigates the extent of this separation and how youth in low-income public housing, who are part of a socioeconomic and racial minority in the city, feel about the public housing community and its relationship to the rest of Hoboken. It also explores how role modeling and/or proximity to middle-class capital influence the lives of youth in public housing, with the potential to bridge the separation between public housing and the rest of the city.

Separate and Different

Although gentrification has moved "west of Willow" (closer to HHA) and expensive homes now border public housing on three sides, the public housing neighborhood is still an area that many Hobokenites fear. Derogatory comments about the neighborhood appear on blogs. "Far west . . . between 2nd and 10th, are trouble spots . . . I for one would rather get a ticket than park my car down there with the fucking savages" (Hoboken411.com, 2007) and advantaged residents discuss the safety of walking around there and the cost benefit of buying homes too close to public housing.

The Hoboken public housing campus appears to be physically separated from its neighboring community. It is located on the far southwest side of Hoboken and does not fit the grid of the city. The high-rise buildings are in the modernist style associated in the collective consciousness with "the projects": violence, drugs, and gangs. When the Center tries to host events or programs for advantaged families, Center staff are faced with concerns when advantaged residents hear that they are on Jackson Street. I spoke with one advantaged mother who would not visit a park on Jackson Street, a block and a half away from public housing, for a long time because she said that she does not "like" Jackson Street. A book entitled *Hoboken: History and Architecture at a Glance* (Gabrielan, 2010, p. 152) features a picture of one of the new real estate developments, the Julianna (formerly the Velocity) at 600 Jackson Street, immediately adjacent to public housing, with the following caption: "The structure is oriented to its interior courtyard. The layout becomes understandable when considering its location adjacent to 'the projects.'"

However, public housing residents clearly feel that their neighborhood is less isolated than it used to be. Wealthy neighbors living across the street and advantaged residents playing organized sports on Mama Johnson Field have opened the public housing campus to outsiders to a certain extent. When asked whether the public housing community is isolated or separate, one HHA mother said,

> I feel like it's all together because you wouldn't have a person that lives in Uptown walk through the projects. They would be so scared. Now, I be like, "Oh, my God," you see, like, these rich people walking through. It's calmer; I like the way they [are] doing it now, whether they decide to knock it out or not.

However, participants of the focus group composed of eight residents from the HHA confirmed that a separation between the public housing community and the rest of Hoboken still exists, as they unanimously agreed that when they think of their "neighborhood," they mean the area around public housing, not all of Hoboken. A teenager said, "I sort of feel like there's a wall between the projects and the other people." She said that some of her white/Asian advantaged friends visited the public housing campus and: "We're, like, hugging her and holding onto her arm like 'Oh, my God, I'm going to get shot.' I guess that's the joke about it, like every time you go to the projects, you're going to get shot." One teenager from HHA explained what she saw as a difference: "Over there [outside public housing] I think people get along and recycle, clean after theirself." A number of participants noted that their neighborhood is louder, dirtier, and less taken care of than the rest of Hoboken.

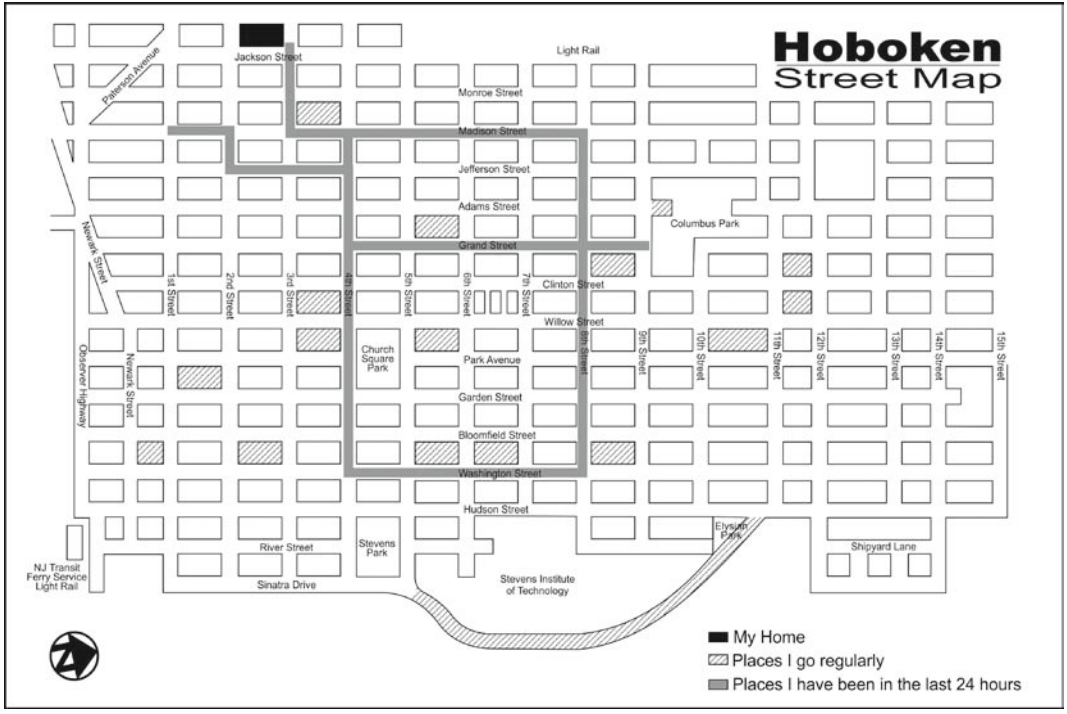
Despite these feelings of physical separation, these young people are not isolated; they are very comfortable in leaving the public housing neighborhood. All of the parents, adults, young adults, and teenagers with whom I spoke leave the public housing campus on a regular basis, beyond going to school, including one of the women who was clearly disabled. They go to the parks and playgrounds, public events, restaurants, cafes, stores, and the library on and near Washington Street. One teenage participant explained this balance: "I feel close to the people I know are in the public housing area, but I do feel comfortable outside of the area."

To test my initial hypothesis that public housing residents are physically isolated on the public housing campus, I gave the youth participants blank maps and asked them to map where they go on a daily basis and their favorite places in the community. The results are clear. All of the completed maps show that these young people are not physically isolated in their neighborhood. All maps show that the youth participants go to at least one park in Hoboken. All show that the youth participants access Washington Street. All but one show that the youth participants go to the waterfront area. Three maps (that are most visually clear) are included to demonstrate this.[1]

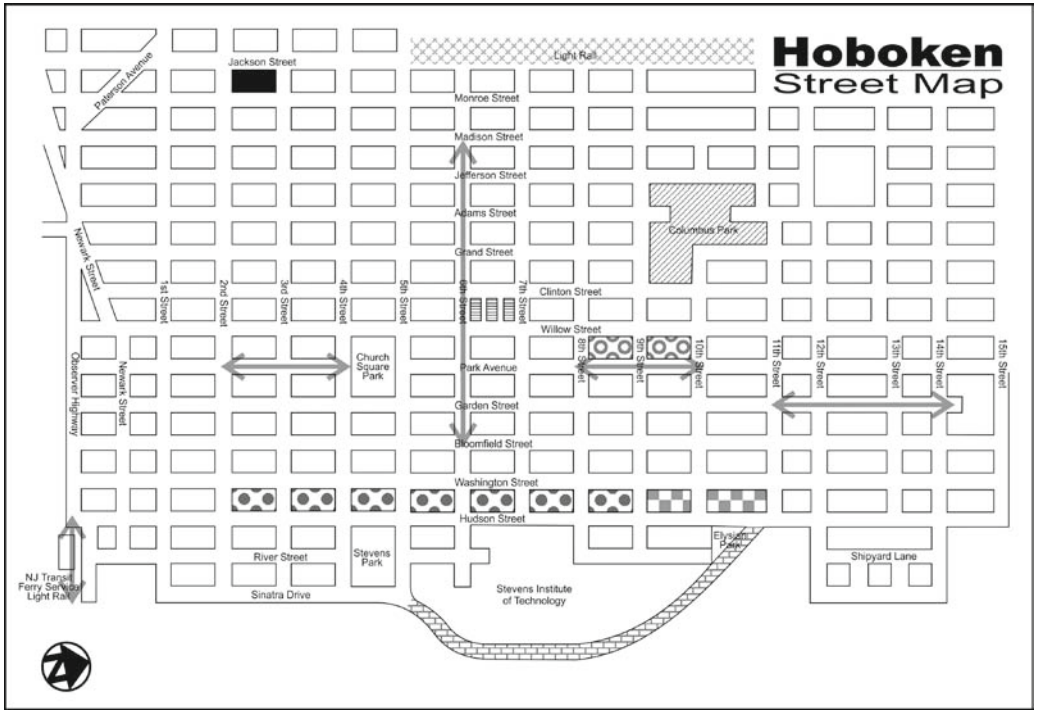
Map 7.1 is clearly labeled and shows that this teenager frequents places throughout Hoboken, including parks, Washington Street, uptown, and the waterfront. Map 7.2 does not have a key but the markings show that this teenager frequents a variety of places in Hoboken: the light rail and areas all over Hoboken, including a long stretch of Washington Street, parks, and the waterfront. Map 7.3 shows that this teenager has "chill spots" and likes parks in Hoboken and on Washington Street but does "not really like" her school.

These youth participant maps (as well as the photographs discussed in chapter 6) clearly demonstrate that although the public housing campus might feel separate from the rest of Hoboken, the activities of the youth who live in public housing are not centered in the public housing campus and their high school. These young people are not self-constrained to the public housing community, like the public housing residents that Small (2004) described in Villa Victoria in Boston.

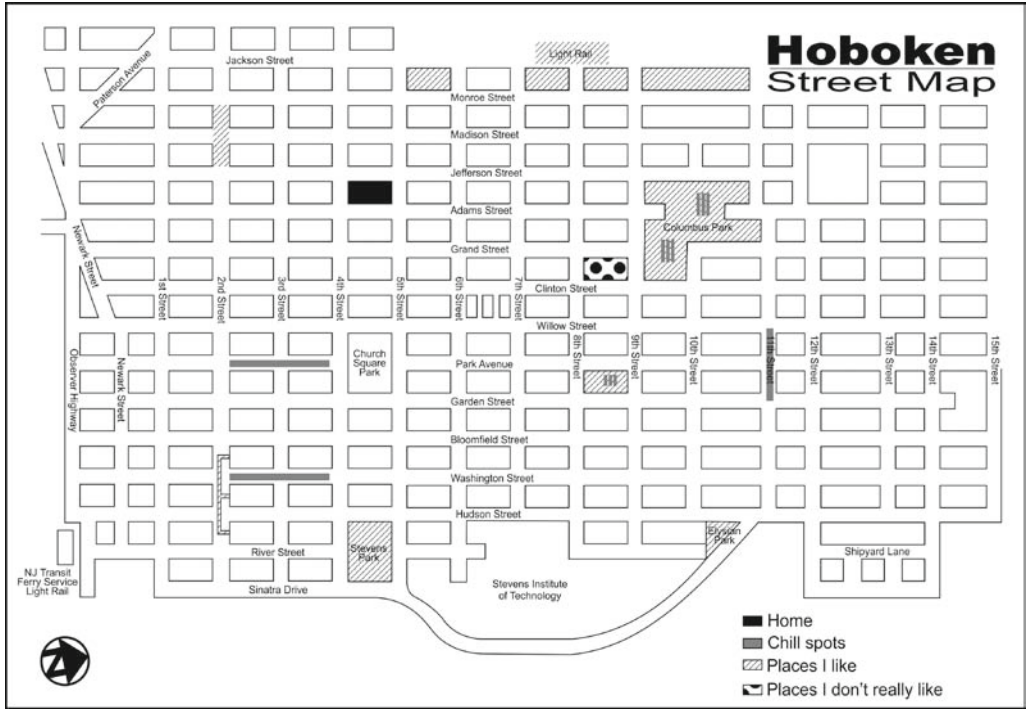
Yet, it is clear that, in spite of this lack of isolation, most public housing residents in Hoboken perceive themselves as different from the advantaged. As one mother remarked, "It's like them and us. We're treated differently, there's no unity within this town." One young adult HHA resident even mentioned feeling like an "alien . . . because when we go on their territory, we stand out in the rest of Hoboken." HHA residents frequently say "y'all" (because they are speaking to me), "yuppies," "they," "them." One woman consistently pointed toward the water and said "them" when referring to advantaged families.



Map 7.1 Youth map: teenager's places of activity, Hoboken 1.



Map 7.2 Youth map: teenager's places of activity, Hoboken 2.



Map 7.3 Youth map: teenager's places of activity, Hoboken 3.

Impressions of Their City

To understand whether the feelings of social separation created negative feelings about Hoboken or about their role in Hoboken for youth in public housing, I asked the teenagers to write lists of words to describe Hoboken. Table 7.1 lists their words or phrases given in response (original spelling maintained).

Although it is difficult to generalize from these findings, which are occasionally contradictory, it is apparent that these youth in public housing in Hoboken (with one exception) do not have strong negative views of the city. When they think of Hoboken, they seem to think of parks, food, and history. To define the overlap and frequency of their words and the overall sentiment of the words, I created a word cloud (figure 7.1). The more frequently the words were used, the more apparent they are in the

Table 7.1 Youths' words to describe Hoboken

Youth 1	*Youth 2*	*Youth 3*	*Youth 4*	*Youth 5*	*Youth 6*	*Youth 7*
Good view	Lovely	Historical	The park	Good parks	Dirty	Historical
Boring	Wonderful	Parks	Historical	History	Boring	Restaurants
Nice	Fun	Wonderful	Fun	Pizza	Nosie	Small
Expensive	Amazing	Fun	Awesome	Good view	Fights	Lively
Rich neighborhood	Cool	Pizza	Nice	Boring	Homeless	Interesting
Hobo's	Great	Small	Funny	River	Broke	Weird
Getto people	Pretty	Babies	The food is good	Musicians	Annoying	Sometimes annoyingly loud
Mean people[a]	Crazy	Exciting	Nice place to go	Small town	Getto	Sometimes depressing
Happy people	Wild	Art	The people	Clean	Fat	Great!
	Happy	Families	The preetty place	Good town	Distructabble	Everyone knows everybody!
		Community	Fun	Nice people	Ugly	Nice people is here
		Unity		Good stores		Awesome
		Hometown		A lot of people		Diversed
		Music		Peaceful here		Lots of fun
		Sports		Lots of liars		Lots of love
		Education				

[a] *When I asked the teenagers to tell me more about "mean people" or "liars" in the community, they cited issues of bullying or arguments with their friends in school. I asked these follow-up questions to determine whether they were referring to issues with advantaged residents, but this was never the case.*

Figure 7.1 Word cloud of youths' words to describe Hoboken, created with wordle.

word cloud (words that had the same meaning as other words [e.g., *history* and *historical*] were made the same so the frequency would be apparent).

It is clear from this word cloud that the young people with whom I worked do not see their community as overwhelmingly scary, intimidating, dangerous, or isolated. They have largely positive impressions—fun, historical, nice, wonderful, good view, parks, pizza, awesome, happy—and a few negative ones—boring, homeless, ghetto. These words demonstrate the bifurcated city in which these young people reside. However, the preponderance of positive words shows that they do not have a strong negative impression of their town. This is in opposition to similar work I have done with low-income residents in a not-gentrified urban area, where the words given were almost entirely negative (Backstrand et al., 2014).

Despite the fact that many residents feel socially separated from the rest of Hoboken, most of the youth in public housing do not realize that they are part of a socioeconomic minority. Many stated that there are "more poor people than rich people in Hoboken." One teenage participant said, "If they were rich, they wouldn't be in Hoboken." Another estimated that Hoboken is 75 percent poor and 25 percent rich. Only one stated that there are more rich people than poor people in Hoboken. One commented, "In the upper part of Hoboken. Yeah, just about a few rich people, I feel like their money never runs out." Although this might be evidence of their teenage narcissism—an inability to look beyond their own immediate circumstances and see the broader picture, it is also evidence that they do not walk around Hoboken feeling like isolated poor children who do not belong.

Homes?

The proposed Vision 20/20 Plan for the demolition and redevelopment of this neighborhood states, "The lack of distinction between the buildings prevents residents from recognizing a particular structure as 'home'" (HHA & Marchetto Higgins Stieve PC, 2010, p. 42). This is in line with the history of public housing redevelopment in which the last half century of public housing policy and design has seen a movement away from impersonal large-scale high-rise identical design to a more personal town house feel. This new design is intended to make residents feel ownership of their homes and their property and to destigmatize living in the "projects."

A few of the pictures that the youth took reflect their positive feelings about public housing (e.g., image 7.1). One teenager reflected on her move

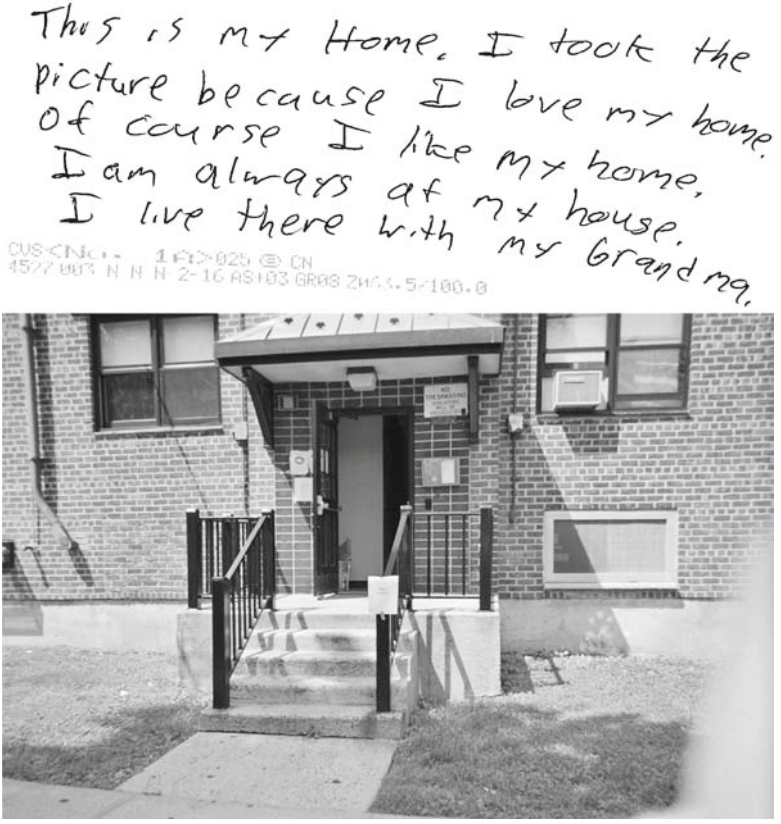


Image 7.1 Youth photograph of public housing, Hoboken.

to Hoboken and wrote under a picture of some trees by the HHA campus, "At that time I really hated 'the Projects.' This place sort of lets me see that Hoboken and the projects do have some beauty." One teenage participant said of public housing, "Honestly, everybody's saying how disgusting the projects are, but, you know what, it's a home." Another said, "It's nice and peaceful and quiet." Another captioned a picture of her building, "my home." These views contrast with the argument generally advanced in neoliberal public housing policy and again show the need for caution in razing people's homes, undermining their sense of place and networks, and possibly creating what Fullilove (2004) called "root shock."

Role Modeling?

Scholars have argued that a benefit to mixed-income housing for youth from low-income families would be exposure to positive, successful role models (Anderson, 1990; Ellen & Turner, 1997). Researchers have argued that exposure to certain role models can increase one's social capital (Putnam, 2000). Some interview questions for this study were used to determine whether the middle-class social capital and cultural capital of the advantaged was being shared with HHA residents through these types of relationships and whether, in turn, advantaged residents were learning from their relationships with youth in public housing. These types of relationships could help to bridge the separation between the public housing campus and the rest of the city.

The interviews uncovered very little evidence of this. When asked about their role models, all of the youth from public housing cited their own mothers and fathers (one cited her mother and a classmate)—not a surprising finding, as most people when asked this questions would likely cite their parent(s). Just because parents live in public housing certainly does not mean that they are not role models for their children. As one teenage participant put it, "I look up to my mom because my mom's a really strong person and she's been through a lot and she hasn't let nobody down no matter what." Another explained that her mother is her role model because "every day I'll be like 'I'm broke, I have no money,' and I know she probably doesn't have any money, but how is there still food on the table? I know she saves up money and she's smart about stuff." Luis's mother, who has close relationships with some advantaged families in Hoboken, when asked whether her children have good role models in Hoboken, said, "Probably my family. That's really it. Like I said, they don't really, are around other people besides my family so, we try to maintain that good role model for them." Just as Joseph et al. (2007) posited, there was no

evidence of cross-group role modeling with these teenagers; they did not say that their role models are wealthy, financially successful advantaged residents in their community; instead, they admired their parents for overcoming obstacles.

I asked the focus group of HHA young adult residents whether they knew of any role modeling occurring between "yuppies" and HHA residents. One participant answered, "Well, we live right next to condos, luxury condos. But we never, never see them." All of the participants were in agreement, except one young adult male who thought about it and then took part in the following exchange:

Participant 6: Actually, my friend lives in there. I have one friend that lives in there.
Interviewer: From the High School?
Participant 6: Yeah, but now she graduated from high school; she's in a college.
Interviewer: So did you, like, hang out with her parents? Did you feel like they were good role models in your life?
Participant 6: I went to her house, and, yeah, I think they're role models. Her mom is friends with my favorite singer, Ciara.

This young man had met his advantaged friend through MSHS. If more advantaged children attended the high school and if the elementary schools were more integrated, there would be more potential for these types of relationships to form. This type of cross-group role modeling and relationship building can benefit HHA residents and advantaged residents. If youth from public housing had more opportunities to make friends with children of highly financially successful college-educated parents, go to their homes, and feel comfortable interacting with them, these experiences and connections could potentially benefit them in terms of education and employment in the future.

Proximity to Middle-Class Capital

Proximity to middle-class capital has the potential to benefit young people who live in public housing. I found that although the teenagers generally were unaware of the socioeconomics of the community, a few expressed some envy over the living conditions of others in Hoboken and the desire to live that way someday (images 7.2 and 7.3).

The teenage participants' photographs as shown in image 7.4 indicate some advantage to living in close proximity to middle-class capital. Living near a college residential campus, corporations, and businesses that could

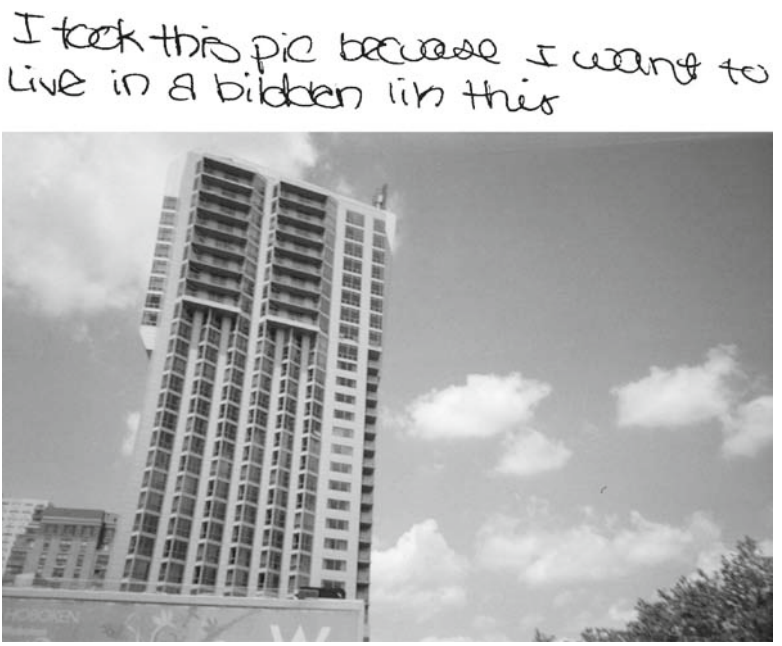


Image 7.2 Youth photograph of advantaged housing in Hoboken.

employ them can influence their quality of life and decrease isolation. One teenager mentioned the campus of Stevens Institute of Technology in the heart of Hoboken and job shadowing at the Wiley building. This teenager wrote about what a good school Stevens is and how it was the third choice college. Another mentioned Stevens Institute of Technology, specifically the Animé Convention that is held there annually. A third mentioned that she would like to work at Ricky's on Washington Street and took a picture of the store.

I also heard stories from HHA residents who had formed mutually beneficial relationships with advantaged Hoboken residents. Luis's mother said that she was touched when an advantaged family for whom she worked gave her children Christmas presents. However, it was not the presents but the woman's presence in her home that moved her.

> She's always looked out for me and my kids and she's come to my house. She came over for Christmas Eve; she came over and gave my kids gifts and things you don't expect. A lady I call my boss lady come and sit on my sofa in the projects. I started crying that day. She said, "Why are you crying?" I

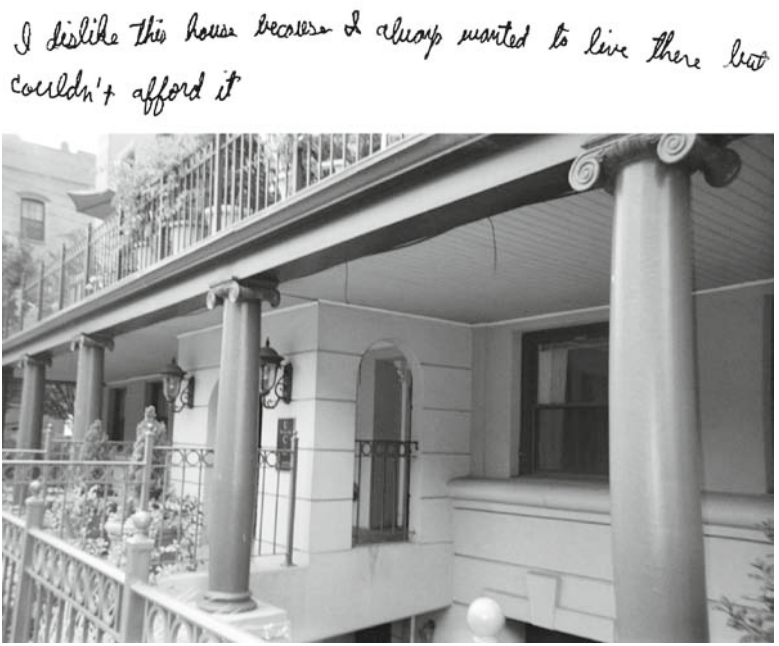


Image 7.3 Youth photograph of advantaged housing in Hoboken, 2.

> said, "People like you don't really exist anymore." And she [asked], "What do you mean?" I was like, "Who's gonna come up here? Who?" You hardly see it. So you go to the projects, it's mostly Hispanics and Blacks, and then you come up here. If people from the projects come up here, that's the only time you see Hispanic or Black.

A woman from HHA who sends her children to a charter school recalled that after Hurricane Sandy, advantaged parents reached out to offer her family assistance and support.

There are also other interesting ways that young people in Hoboken benefit from the wealth and demographics of the community. For example, local restaurants, including the high-end steak house at the W Hotel, regularly provide dinners to families who use the Center. In the summer, when there is a free summer lunch program for Hoboken residents at a number of parks throughout town, advantaged families sometimes take lunches and picnic in the park with them. While not the intended targets of the program, this may make it more comfortable for those who need the lunches to get them and enjoy them in the parks.

Image 7.4 Youth photograph, employment opportunity, Hoboken.

Implications

I did not find that living next to extreme wealth left youth in public housing isolated or depressed about their situation; overall, they like Hoboken and access many amenities throughout the city, although they feel a separation between their community and the rest of the city. To create real change in their lives as a result of the city demographics, significant changes should be made to the segregated school system in Hoboken, as in communities nationwide. True mixing does not occur in a community by virtue of living next door to someone or even playing together at the park or attending cultural events side-by-side.

As the youth participants and parents in this study reported, the children form their social networks in elementary school, which can last through the years. The young people and parents clearly identify that children form their friendships during schooltime in Hoboken. This research shows

that children from public housing who attend the segregated Washington School have social networks made up mostly of other children from public housing, while children who attend the more diverse King or advantaged youth at MSHS are more likely to have a more diverse group of friends. If all public housing youth were attending diverse, integrated, middle-class schools, there would be potential for role modeling and more expansive social networks. Yet, neoliberal school choice has created an environment in which, despite the demographics of the city, both advantaged parents and parents in public housing can make school decisions that are sustaining rather than ending segregation.

Even more important than integrating schools, there must be a larger discussion about poverty and income inequality in the United States (Anyon, 2005; Berliner, 2007). There are large economic divisions between youth in public housing and advantaged youth that are almost insurmountable because of the associated effects of socioeconomic class. Many of the parents in this study who lived in HHA were gainfully employed: with the Board of Education, in transportation, in hospitality at a hotel, at stores, and at institutions of higher education. Many very poor and unemployed residents live in public housing, but there are also residents who are working and still struggling to make ends meet. There are few realistic ways for them to overcome poverty when they are at a disadvantage even before entering school. The cycle of poverty will continue as long as economic inequality is this great.

In this economic system, those at the top rely on those at the bottom to provide services (Sassen, 1990). Many of the advantaged in Hoboken want to have their homes cleaned, their children cared for by nannies, and their nails manicured, and they have the economic capital to make this happen. However, those in the service industry are not making enough to break the cycle of poverty, and the achievement gap will not decrease until this occurs, whether the poor are moved to opportunity or the opportunity moves to them. Neoliberal nonegalitarianism that relies increasingly on the private sector rather than on the public sector weakens the existing supports for low-income families and makes it more difficult for them to survive and thrive. In the past, families could thrive in public housing, working their way up the social ladder to advance out of public housing and into home ownership and the middle class. Now there are structural impediments to this type of mobility.

What Can Be Done

There are ways that Hoboken can be a case study for other communities in attempting to use existing community resources to decrease inequality.

Decrease Urban Bifurcation through Housing Policy

Without a complete restructuring of the American economy and ideology, economic diversity must be maintained in cities through public housing, subsidized housing, and rent control. It is problematic that cities have become places where only the wealthy and the poor can live because the working class and lower-middle classes have been squeezed out. It is more important that public housing be maintained and, with it, some level of citywide urban socioeconomic diversity.

Even Jacobs (1961), who famously wrote in disgust about slum clearance and high-rise public housing design, argued that public housing projects should not be demolished. "These expenditures, in spite of having been ill conceived, are too large to write off, even for a country as rich as ours" (p. 393). Jacobs argued that, to be safe, a street must have clearly marked private and public spaces, have eyes on it, and be frequently used. She claimed that housing projects did not have these qualities but asserted that they could be improved. This study has demonstrated that many of these qualities are coming to public housing via gentrification. As one HHA mother reflected,

> It [the public housing campus] used to be a little isolated, but now it doesn't feel like that anymore because there's so many other things coming around it. It's funny to even find like, "Oh, where did this building [come from] this wasn't here?" So it doesn't feel isolated. I think we're surrounded by so many other buildings, it seems pretty cool now.

Public housing should be maintained and improved so residents can benefit from gentrification.

In Hoboken, maintaining the low-income housing projects is not the only necessary move. Rent control laws should be clarified and strengthened, and all new developments should be required to provide set-asides for low- and moderate-income residents (this has not happened historically in Hoboken). One charter school founder explained the need for more affordable housing in Hoboken:

> I don't think there's enough public housing. I think that it's terrible that our society has become such a kind of a winner-take-all type of society where we're an incredibly wealthy, prosperous country, and I feel like everything is rigged to benefit the rich, and I think that's deeply unfair. I think the least we can do is offer public housing and subsidized housing. I would like to see more subsidized housing, for example, for teachers. Our teachers can't afford to live here in town. I mean, the thing is, they provide an essential service to our community, and they can't afford to live here, and I think that's a shame.

Building community schools, as mentioned in chapter 4, also has the potential to disrupt disadvantage and decrease bifurcation.

Bridge the Communities

Those who work with residents in public housing should make every effort to harness the capital of the advantaged to benefit those most at risk and to bridge the separation between the HHA main campus and the rest of Hoboken. The Center has begun to host activities (during hours when the Center was previously not in use) geared toward advantaged residents. These activities have the potential to increase revenue for the Center and bridge the divide between the communities by "opening up" Jackson Street. The most socioeconomically and racially diverse event that I experienced in Hoboken was an 10,000-egg Easter egg hunt on Mama Johnson Field hosted by a local church. More efforts like these should be made to open this community to advantaged residents without taking away access to amenities for public housing residents or demolishing and rebuilding the neighborhood.

The communities should be opened up to one another spatially, with more walkways and green space through public housing open to the public. Restaurants, bars, and other amenities should be encouraged and supported on the southwest side of Hoboken. More festivals and other events that the advantaged cannot resist and that are marketed to advantaged residents and public housing residents alike should take place on Jackson Street. Affiliations with local churches, day care centers, and social sports leagues should be formed to host these events. All events on Washington Street should be deliberately marketed to public housing residents.

Neighbors United

I recommend the creation of a program in Hoboken that gives the advantaged community the opportunity to use their economic capital to "pay it forward" for their low-income neighbors. There is much that we do not know about closing the achievement gap or improving school outcomes for low-income children of color, but there is also much we do know. As Ravitch (2013, p. 6) explained, "We know what works. What works are the very opportunities that advantaged families provide for their children." We know that early childhood education is beneficial; low-income youth in Hoboken already have access to this. We know that children need exposure to quality medical, dental, eye care and to the types of supplemental experiences and programs that middle-class children access regularly. While changing the path of neoliberal nonegalitarianism, fixing the vast income

disparities, and desegregating schools are significant goals, I propose working in cities like Hoboken on realistic programs that could help to narrow the achievement gap and improve the quality of life for low-income residents. Cities and neighborhoods like Hoboken with a large percentage of upper-middle-class, well-educated, diversity-minded citizens are rich with opportunity for this.

I propose that a nonprofit or community trust be established in Hoboken that would work with local businesses to establish a *Neighbors United* program. Local businesses—pediatric dentists, mommy and me class providers, dance studios, martial arts studios, tutoring companies, puppet show providers, swimming lessons, yoga studios, summer camps, math/literacy/language classes, music classes, parenting and breastfeeding and nutrition classes, cooking classes, gymnastics and sports classes, SAT prep companies, college counselors, after-school enrichment, even prenatal massage therapists and breast feeding consultants—could have programs where when advantaged members sign up their children or themselves they could also choose to *sponsor* a child or parent who lives below poverty level to have the same opportunity.

Ideally, businesses and wealthy individuals could receive tax write-offs and other benefits for participating in or donating to *Neighbors United*. This would benefit everyone involved because it would give advantaged children more diverse classes and social networks, something advantaged parents desire in choosing to live in an urban space, and provide opportunity to low-income children that can benefit them in multiple ways. The program would be managed in cooperation with members of the community in public housing and trusted organizations that work with the low-income residents so that it would be utilized and trusted by many, not just a few. It would have to be closely regulated for fairness and transparency.

This type of opportunity would give advantaged families a way to make a difference in their community with very little time spent. This is akin to what charter school parents are already doing in paying extra for class trips for other students. It is also similar to the idea of TOMS One for One shoe program, where every shoe that is bought is matched by one donated to a child in need.

This would have to be a blind program, in that advantaged families would not know whom they were sponsoring. Long term, it would be ideal to find ways to expand the program to be a cooperative in which residents in public housing create opportunities for advantaged families to learn from them and for both to learn together (e.g., cooking or crafts courses). New programs in town could also be created and sponsored to be affordable and to appeal to both groups.

The idea behind *Neighbors United* would not be purely for advantaged individuals to help low-income people; the program could create diverse experiences for the entire community and break through extant separations. It is based on proven evidence that middle-class opportunities provide children with advantages in the classroom and in life and that all children benefit from exposure to diversity.

This program could be piloted in the public preschool programs as part of an effort to create diverse preschools. At sites where parents currently pay for after-school enrichment programs such as soccer and piano, there should be a way for advantaged parents to put money towards low-income students participating in these programs as well. This would create more diverse enrichment programs while avoiding a "haves" and "have nots" scenario in which some students are enriched while others cannot afford it. Some might argue that these activities are luxuries and not necessary. But if advantaged parents truly believed that such activities did not provide benefits, they would not be spending money on them for their own children.

Chapter Eight

Prolonged Gentrification: Universal Preschool, School Choice, and Real Estate Development

One Hoboken family purchased a home in an expensive suburb in New Jersey but discovered at the same time how much they liked the early childhood program in the public schools in which their daughter was enrolled. They decided to stay in Hoboken for another year while renting out their home in the suburbs as corporate housing. Another family wanted to take advantage of the preschool program before their preordained move to the suburbs. This family knew that in the time it would take their first born to finish preschool, they would have additional children; with that in mind, they rented out the two-bedroom condominium that they owned for well over $2,000 per month and rented a three-bedroom apartment in another building for their own growing family. A third family sold their Hoboken apartment, which they felt that they had outgrown, but did not want to leave until they heard whether their child was accepted into a charter school. So they rented an apartment while waiting for the results of the charter school lottery and planned to purchase a larger apartment if their child was accepted or move to the suburbs if not. These are just a few examples that I came across of how education policy is influencing real estate in a gentrified community.

Changing Demographics and School Choice

Gentrification often occurs in stages both of development and of residents, as in Hoboken. In the beginning, gentrification is welcomed (at least initially it often was in urban areas in the 1970s). It was perceived as much-needed improvement and development in communities that were in need of a renaissance. As young childless couples renovated brownstones and became involved in the community, this was understood as improvement. As one of these early gentrifiers in Hoboken explained,

> I liked the opportunity to mingle with the guy who lived next to us when we moved there. I think they took a lot of interest in us, fixing up the house, because it used to be a boarding house, so they were glad to see that go. They saw us as stability moving in.

However there was always a dark side to this neighborhood change, as the same man explained.

> In the early '80s I remember sitting in our apartment . . . you've heard of the mysterious fires that were going on back then. I remember going, "Holy mackerel!" and looking out our back window. We're on the third floor, and a block and a half away was sort of a loft factory fire. We couldn't stand at the window it was so intense the heat from that fire. So there was a lot of talk of gentrification going on and I was feeling like, "Oh shit, I'm one of them, I don't want to be guilty of what's going on in this town." I was a little bit aware of it.

These demographic shifts would have long-term consequences, not just for the obvious community demographics and real estate but also for the school system. In Hoboken, these early liberal gentrifiers went on to raise children in Hoboken and to contribute to founding the first two charter schools in the community. These charter schools gave early wave gentrifiers a way to stay in Hoboken while feeling that their educational desires for their children were met. These two charter schools, one progressive and the other service learning, were founded by a group of parents of small children in Hoboken called Mile Square Families. As the charter schools gained popularity and added grades, they established wait lists because desire outpaced available positions. As mentioned in chapter 6, these founders had a vision to create liberal progressive diverse schools that matched their outlook in moving to a community in the early stages of change.

Hoboken in 2014 is a gentrified city. When residents move in, they may roll their eyes and struggle to admit that they live in New Jersey instead of New York City. But they are not moving into an area considered "up and coming," and they do not come to Hoboken with concerns over personal safety or a feeling that they are "pioneers."

Hoboken is clearly gentrified. As one resident said, it is quite possible to live in Hoboken and never see people who are not rich and white. As gentrification increased, real estate costs skyrocketed and gentrification became supergentrification (a situation in which real estate prices increase dramatically and early gentrifiers are priced out of a community by new residents whose incomes, often generated by global capital markets, far surpass early wave gentrifiers). Supergentrifiers are perceived to be less altruistic and community minded than early wave gentrifiers (Lees, 2003).

Supergentrification in Hoboken also means a changing demographic. A developer of luxury property noted that, along with becoming more family friendly, Hoboken has also become a place for retirement. These wealthy seniors are looking to downsize from large homes in suburbia and move into three-bedroom apartments (that cost more than $1 million). When an area becomes a place for retirees, it is certainly a sign that it is no longer *gentrifying*.

At what point then does gentrification no longer exist as a relevant term or theory in this context? At what point do we eliminate gentrification from the discussion of Hoboken? There is still undeveloped property, pockets of homes are still inhabited by "old timers" who struggle to pay the taxes, there are fights over rent control and fair housing, and the public housing campus faces the possibility of demolition and redevelopment. As real estate continues to boom in Hoboken, there are still people being pushed out or priced out of a place they have called home. It remains a youthful transient community in which white middle-class people are seen as brave and pioneering if they choose to raise children in Hoboken for the long term. It is still a town in which there are conversations and events focusing on which suburbs will be the best fit for raising a family. Hoboken, the "Comeback City" (Bierbaum, 1980) was, and is, seen as an example of urban redevelopment and revitalization. If other cities wish to be the "next Hoboken," then lessons must be learned from the ongoing changes in neighborhood demographics. Gentrification is as much about what an area *used* to be as about what it currently *is*. It refers to neighborhood change, and this community is still changing and reeling from and reacting to change.

What Is Prolonged Gentrification?

This research supports a link between school choice, both district and charter, universal preschool, and real estate. These educational policies are creating prolonged gentrification. Advantaged families feel that the high-quality universal preschool is a significant savings for them; thus, they prolong their time in Hoboken. Also, the fact that there is choice for preschool location allows self-selection (and with that, self-segregation) to occur. Therefore, advantaged families are not routinely asked to send children to preschool at Washington, which serves a larger portion of students of color from low-income backgrounds and would be outside their comfort zone.

When advantaged children get older, elementary charter schools, which serve students who are white and wealthier than those in district schools, are seen as "the golden ticket." When families do not get into charter schools, district school choice allows them to avoid Washington again (and

keeps a large number of low-income students of color at Washington and not in the other schools) thus keeping the advantaged in the community longer. In this way, choice and real estate are connected.

Prolonged gentrification occurs when advantaged people choose to stay in an urban environment longer than previous waves had, while usually not planning to settle ultimately in the community. This prolonged gentrification swells real estate costs because, if families stay longer, they are more likely to have more than one child and desire more space. Also, the longer families stay, the higher their income potential because they are more established and farther along in their careers. Thus, because of prolonged gentrification residents are likely to stay in urban areas into their thirties and forties rather than leave in their late twenties. They are more likely to buy homes for a family unit rather than renting with multiple young singles. In Hoboken, they are likely to be in the FIRE (finance, insurance, real estate) industries rather than young artists struggling to make ends meet. Frequently, these people bought one- or two-bedroom homes that they outgrew and subsequently they bought or rented three bedroom homes. This increased purchasing power is seen as a positive development in a community for those who are financially invested.

There has been an increased desire for three-bedroom apartments in Hoboken reflecting this change. When plans are made for redevelopment, there is consideration for larger family-friendly units. The City's Master Plan Reexamination Report in 2010 called for creating "innovative zoning to promote home ownership and larger housing units to make Hoboken more family-oriented and less transient" (EFB Associates, 2010, p. 6). When one waterfront development, 1100 Maxwell Place, began sales in 2013, three-bedroom apartments in the building were priced at more than $1 million (REW Staff, 2013). A luxury developer in town confirmed an increase in interest in and construction of such three-bedroom apartments, which he described as the most valuable units per square foot. Now, 11 percent of apartments in one of these developments are three-bedroom apartments priced at more than $900/square foot.

Why the Advantaged Are Staying Longer Now and What Influence This Has

The idea that gentrifiers may stay and raise families in the community is relatively new. Increasing numbers of families are staying in Hoboken with their young children. In large part, this was heralded by early wave gentrifiers and their work with the two initial charter schools. Today, the charter schools are for many advantaged parents the only way to stay in Hoboken rather than move to the suburbs. Many families in Hoboken say that the

only reason they stayed was because their child got into a charter school; they note that sibling preference means that all of their children would then eventually be able to attend the school. The point at which there was an increased ability and interest in purchasing three-bedroom apartments, as noted by the developer, coincided with the opening of Espagnol Charter School in 2010, which has a private bus company (paid for by parents) that picks up children from two waterfront developments and drives them across town to Espagnol. With the opening of a new charter school that has been popular with advantaged parents, there was more school choice in the community.

Although charter schools and district schools have not lived in harmony in the Mile Square City, even the most ardent district school advocates in Hoboken today seem to have come to terms with the two original charter schools. A founder of Dewey Charter School is on the Hoboken School Board and aligned with the ticket that is perceived to be "anti-charter." These district school advocates say that these two charter schools were founded, for the "right reasons," by people who care about the community.

At a Hoboken Board of Education meeting in June 2014, one resident accused the School Board of giving "sweetheart deals" to these two charter schools for space in their buildings. Yet, when a new charter school, DaVinci, wanted to open and when Espagnol applied for extension and expansion, the conversations about these two schools was very acrimonious. Once again, these two charter schools were founded by white middle-class parents; however, more than a decade later than the original two charter schools, these parents are part of the later waves of Hoboken newcomers. These are parents who moved to Hoboken after it was gentrified and these parents are viewed differently by some in the community as not having at heart the best interests of the city as a whole.

Parents in Hoboken in 2014 feel that they have more choices than in the past. Like the charter schools before them, Espagnol is very popular with advantaged parents and has had success with its students. In 2014, at least one of the district schools, King, is seen as a reasonable option for advantaged parents until their children reach about fifth grade. Advantaged parents walk through town with King T-shirts and share their positive experiences with other parents. If parents in Hoboken were required to send their children to their neighborhood school, many who live closer to Washington than King would not see this as a reasonable option and would leave Hoboken sooner. Instead, they remain, with their increased spending power, and they opt for the farther-away school (King) until their children are a little older and they will relocate.

Parents in Hoboken in 2014 have universal tuition-free preschool and the opportunity to exert a preference of preschool location. This allows

parents, regardless of where they live, to choose the school site that they feel is the best fit for their child. For advantaged parents, all of the sites except Washington are seen as good options. This preschool programming, provided through the progressive *Abbott v Burke* school equity litigation, was meant to even the opportunities for low-income children living in districts where they had not been given the same opportunities as wealthy children.

In Hoboken, however, in an inversion of *Abbott*, this funding is leading to prolonged gentrification. This is allowing advantaged families to save money on preschool or child care—money that, if they so choose, can be used for real estate or to save for private school or college. These families are staying in Hoboken longer, contributing to increased real estate prices as the demand for larger apartments increases. They have more money to potentially put towards real estate because their preschool and (if they get in) charter school education is free. Meanwhile, young people from public housing are attending preschool—a significant asset—but the schools are not as socioeconomically diverse as they could be and the district still appears to struggle with recruitment of these young people into the early childhood program.

In my research, advantaged parents in Hoboken who would be considered upper-middle to upper class (making $200,000+) remarked that private school was not really an option for their family. There were many reasons behind this: personal experiences with public education, ideas about who private education is for, thoughts about the private school options in Hoboken, not wanting to pay twice (in taxes and then for private education), and concern about paying for college.

It was clear that for many very wealthy Hoboken residents, strong public school options would or do (in the case of charter schools) make Hoboken more desirable for the longer term. As one person in real estate said, "If the schools were better, the grass would not be such an issue." This meant that although families leave because of a desire for more space and a backyard, at its core is concern over schooling. The fact that a quality public school education is not yet, in the advantaged residents' eyes, available to them in Hoboken leads them to leave unless they are admitted to a charter school and even then many feel they will have to move when their children get to high school unless they are accepted into selective county schools. Clearly, these advantaged families feel entitled to a quality public education. Meanwhile, low-income public housing residents seldom question their neighborhood school, despite its less-than-stellar outcome metrics.

Chapter Nine
"I Love Diversity": Implications and Promise

I feel their master plan is to get rid of all of this.
—Interview, HHA resident, commenting on the Vision 20/20 Plan for redeveloping public housing in Hoboken, 2012

I love diversity!
—Interview, white advantaged mother, 2014

This book has told a story of young people who live in public housing in the gentrified community of Hoboken, New Jersey. The findings show that despite the valuing of diversity that advantaged residents claim, school integration in a community that is predominantly middle class is not occurring. Youth from public housing do not attend integrated, predominantly middle-class schools as a result of gentrification because neoliberal school choice policies maintain school segregation. Both advantaged parents and HHA parents make school decisions out of fierce protectiveness of their children; neither group wants to take what they perceive as a "chance" with their children. As a result, the children attend different schools.

The majority of public housing residents opt for their local school, Washington, as their school "choice" decisions are constrained and based primarily on convenience and social networks. Meanwhile, advantaged residents opt for charter schools, private schools, or public schools other than Washington. They make these decisions based on social networks, the reputation of the school, parental involvement, and the presence of a clear rigorous educational philosophy. Public housing residents are not applying to charter schools, founded by and dominated by the advantaged, for three reasons: preference for their neighborhood school, confusion about the nature and purpose of charter schools, and a lack of fit with those schools. Meanwhile, advantaged parents do not even consider Washington because of a fear that their children will not fit in, as well as the school's reputation and test scores. The result is that the potential for school integration and

sharing of social and cultural capital that comes with gentrification adjacent to public housing is lost.

However, in contrast to existing literature on this topic, young people in public housing in this gentrified community enjoy access to parks and public spaces, free sociocultural events, transportation options, restaurants, cafes, and shops that are the results of gentrification. They struggle with the affordability of amenities in Hoboken, but overall they enjoy many of the same spaces and places as advantaged residents. While youth from public housing do not feel isolated, they feel physically separated and socially different from the larger Hoboken community. Although public housing residents are comfortable in accessing all of Hoboken, meaningful sharing of cultural and social capital between the groups does not occur frequently. HHA residents sense a divide, in large part due to segregation in the schools. While HHA residents are comfortable in accessing all of Hoboken, advantaged residents are not comfortable in accessing all of the HHA neighborhood. Meanwhile, universal preschool and school choice are leading to a phenomenon that I call prolonged gentrification.

For young children like Luis, neoliberal nonegalitarianism is undermining the supports that in past generations could have assisted him in being on a more level playing field with Olivia. Instead, charter school budgets negatively influence district school budgets, school choice has provided no choice for him, and market-based reforms focused on test scores are stigmatizing schools such as Washington, where he will attend school next year. His teachers will also be forced to worry a great deal about these standardized test scores. Public housing where he lives has lost political and financial support for decades and now policies to demolish it are in vogue. While he benefits from universal preschool, so do the advantaged children. Along with charter school choice, this is making Hoboken a more desirable place to live and creating prolonged gentrification, increasing the cost of living, which has unequal consequences for low-income citizens. All of these policies, whether inadvertently or purposefully, increase the power of the advantaged at the expense of children like Luis.

These findings show that current public housing policy that promotes demolition of public housing and creation of mixed-income communities is not necessary in gentrifying or gentrified communities where public housing has been well maintained. The environmental benefits for low-income residents from this movement toward poverty deconcentration will come through gentrification alone. Many of the arguments used to justify demolition of public housing (such as isolation and lack of access to amenities) are simply not issues for public housing residents in Hoboken because of gentrification.

The broader neoliberal policy move away from federal support of public housing and toward private-public partnerships, and mixed-income

development threatens the very existence of public housing and the diversity that it brings to cities. Cities like New York and Hoboken are quickly becoming places where only the wealthy can reside, and fixed public housing policies are one of the few tools to stave off full-scale gentrification. Yet, rather than large-scale investment in improving the existing system and further development of what is working in public housing, an increasing reliance is being placed on private partnerships and on the middle class.

The same neoliberal forces that are at work in the privatization of public housing are influencing school reform. The "school reform" that is happening in Hoboken is not the work of educational policy improving curriculum or creating integration; instead, it is middle-class residents using their own sweat equity to create alternative schools in the form of charter schools. These middle-class residents are writing the charters, running the boards, and frequently working as employees in the schools (at times in leadership roles). While we know that with middle-class influence comes increased services that may benefit all students, it is also clear that this results, however unwittingly, in the favoring of middle-class residents. As Posey-Maddox (2014, p. 145) showed, "The choices and engagement of even the most well-meaning parents can contribute to inequality in public schooling because of their positions within broader systems of advantage and disadvantage." The school that Posey-Maddox observed was a district school grappling with the advantages and disadvantages of middle-class parent involvement; in Hoboken, this is compounded in that they are creating their own charter schools.

To further complicate the issue, other educational "reforms" that are occurring on a large scale because of NCLB, Race to the Top, and private foundation support (such as the Common Core Standards, an increased focus on testing, and teacher accountability based largely on test scores) serve to create pedagogy that will drive middle-class residents away from district schools in which there is potential for integration. Advantaged parents in Hoboken fear "teaching to the test." Many do not want an education that is "too traditional." Meanwhile, teachers and administrators are forced to focus increasingly on test scores. Advantaged parents often see their children as gifted and in need of extra inspiration and creativity, rather than test-taking strategies. This desire drives them toward charter schools—or creation of new charter schools. Because of the economic, social, and cultural capital that these children bring to the school, the threat of low test scores is lessened (while still present) for all.

Increasingly, neoliberal policies that promote gentrification, school choice, and demolition of public housing have created an environment in cities in which advantaged residents are wielding a great deal of power over the direction of housing and education. Young people from low-income minority families in gentrifying or gentrified cities are now living in a

middle- to upper-middle-class environment but are still attending segregated schools and socializing in segregated networks. In addition, they are facing potential demolition and redevelopment of their housing. Unchecked neoliberalism could lead to the breakup and privatization of both their schools and their housing.

Who Has 20/20 Vision?

This qualitative case study of the mile-square city of Hoboken, New Jersey, supports rethinking about current public housing policy. The case in Hoboken, a city on the precipice of new urban renewal (i.e., the demolition of public housing projects to build mixed-income development in line with current thinking and policy on public housing) demonstrates that such a move is not only unnecessary but would have adverse effects on the most at-risk residents and the diversity of the community.

Neoliberalism and gentrification in Hoboken have created a situation in which the benefits that would come to public housing residents from demolishing public housing and rebuilding—increased safety, amenities, parks and playgrounds, transportation—are already present. Youth in public housing in Hoboken feel a degree of physical separation and social difference but they use the amenities that Hoboken has to offer. HHA residents enjoy the cultural commodities of Zukin's (2010, p.7) "bourgeois bohemians" and attain cultural capital from this exposure. They enjoy the parks, walking and eating along Washington Street, and the piers on the waterfront; they have access to local transportation options to get to nearby cities, as well as supermarkets, banks, and a library.

When I worked with youth in East Harlem in 2007 and 2008, there was no Starbucks in that area. One day, I was walking on Third Avenue around 116th Street when a group of white people in an SUV slowed down and yelled out the window, looking straight at me, "Where is the Starbucks?" The group of black and Latino teenagers with whom I was walking started laughing hysterically, amused that we had been asked for a Starbucks in East Harlem. They were also amused because the white people looked at me, the one person in the group who did not live in East Harlem, to ask where it was.

In Hoboken, the young people who live in the HHA do not have to laugh at the idea of a local Starbucks. While advantaged residents might not think that it appeals to them in the way it does to me, these findings demonstrate that it does and that youth in public housing enjoy these types of amenities in their community. However, the problem remains that, with insufficient education and career opportunities and a lack of middle-class social, cultural, and economic capital, they will not have the same ability as advantaged residents to afford these amenities.

One area that gentrification has clearly not improved for youth in public housing is education. Youth of color from low-income families attend majority minority schools with below-average test scores and large numbers of low-income children. The demolition of public housing to build a mixed-income community will not improve the educational issues in Hoboken. The only way to increase integration in education in Hoboken, which should be a goal of all urban reformers and which will benefit youth in public housing as well as advantaged youth, is to create plans and policies, within the current system, to attract and allow for all parents to make school choices that promote economic and racial integration.

There is a growing body of research showing that advantaged parents are choosing to send their children to urban district schools (Cucchiara, 2013; Posey-Maddox, 2014). However, this integration must be managed by larger forces; otherwise, there is the potential for the interests of the advantaged to dominate and undermine the very goals of integration (Posey-Maddox, 2014). There is little evidence of a commitment on the part of the government, advantaged parents, or elected officials in Hoboken to create this type of balanced integration.

Over the past 20 years, many cities undergoing gentrification and faced with dwindling financial support for existing public housing have chosen to demolish public housing projects in favor of mixed-income housing and poverty deconcentration. The cynics and conflict theorists argue that this is all part of a larger neoliberal agenda to clear out the urban poor, usually people of color, and make room for global elites and corporate wealth (Crump, 2002; Hackworth, 2007; Lipman, 2011; Smith, 1979). Even those who believe that the intentions behind these plans are honorable must remember that, historically, when authorities attempt to engineer better social conditions for low-income families, they often miss the particularities of their lives and much is lost (Jacobs, 1961; Young & Willmott, 1992).

In Hoboken public housing, I saw numerous examples of the benefits of social networks for the residents that could be lost if the housing is not maintained. Families in HHA have social capital; that is, they feel a sense of safety and collective efficacy because they know that their friends, neighbors, and relatives are watching their children. One participant from HHA noted,

> Parents look after each other's kids here. I've had a couple of moms who knew my daughter, when she would play with their kids, I never had to worry about anything happening to them because they all watch each other's children. When it comes to the kids, we're like a family, but with the other things, no. But when it comes to the kids, they bond. No one messes with our kids.

One teenage participant explained, "It's, like, everybody knows everybody, so they have your back, no matter what. If you're in trouble you could just

[say] 'Hey, help me out.'" These residents are part of a well-connected community (Putnam, 2000).

Social networks also influence the day-to-day lives of residents. One grandmother told me that she and her daughter, who both live in public housing, do their shopping at "BJ's, you know, you can buy wholesale and get a certain amount. And if it's too much, my daughter is my neighbor and we split it. She pays for one, and I pay for one, and then we split it… I live by myself and I cannot bring too much home." When her daughter had a child and was in a smaller HHA apartment, they traded apartments so her daughter could raise her child in the larger apartment where she had grown up.

These examples of social networks in public housing demonstrate what could be lost if, in its current form, it is torn down, not to mention the "root shock" that families would feel. Fullilove (2004, p. 11) defined *root shock* as the "traumatic stress reaction to the destruction of all or part of one's emotional ecosystem." She warned that urban renewal efforts cause root shock for urban African Americans and can threaten "the whole body's ability to function" (p. 11). She noted that because "you dance in a ballroom, have a parade in a street, make love in a bedroom, and prepare a feast in a kitchen" (p. 10), these places, a person's roots, are deeply important. She detailed how the experience of root shock can negatively affect generations of people. This should be a concern in Hoboken as the teenage youth participants expressed warm feelings about their homes in public housing and the surrounding city. Ultimately, as Sister Norbetta, a tenant activist, said, "I think people should have a right to some stability. Families have a right to live in a neighborhood" (as cited in Schept, 1981, p. 16).

The advantaged in Hoboken appreciate diversity, but many are aware that their housing values will increase if public housing in its current form is destroyed. One advantaged participant, an urban educator, said,

> As a homeowner, I know that if the public housing didn't exist behind where I live, my home would be worth significantly more money than it is at this point. On the other hand, everyone needs a place to live, so it's definitely a two-sided question for me. But when finances come into play, in my mind and in my upbringing that becomes the most important thing. So I would rather that they weren't there, but they are.

The proposed Vision 20/20 plan for demolishing public housing in Hoboken calls for one-for-one replacement so that no residents will be displaced. However, Congress suspended the requirement for this in 1995 (Goetz, 2011), and the research from other cities shows that this directive is generally unrealistic (Buron et al., 2002; Goetz, 2003; Marquis & Ghosh, 2008; National Housing Law Project, 2002; Popkin et al., 2000).

The National Housing Law Project (2002, para. 17) made the following comments about HOPE VI redevelopment projects:

> Contrary to impressions conveyed by HUD, only 11.4 percent of former residents overall have returned or are expected to return to HOPE VI sites; only about 30 percent of displaced residents are relocated with portable Housing Choice Vouchers. The bulk of residents, 49 percent, are simply transferred to other public housing developments. And, a disturbing number of the residents who are officially relocated are "lost" along the way, meaning that they no longer receive housing assistance.

New strict requirements for residency, administrative dysfunction, issues with navigating the bureaucracy, and too little new affordable housing are among the reasons that many residents do not return to redeveloped public housing sites. A Choice Neighborhood calls for one-for-one replacement, but potential loopholes remain. Any plans for development in Hoboken must be carefully monitored, as the real estate is precious and the history of alleged corruption deep. In 2014, development in Hoboken became national news when the mayor of Hoboken alleged that Christie's administration withheld Hurricane Sandy funds over a development project that the mayor did not approve. As a CNN story at the time began, "Most issues in Hoboken, New Jersey, ultimately boil down to real estate" (Kastenbaum, 2014, para. 1). For this reason, the large amount of land on the HHA campus and any future development must be carefully monitored.

Ample housing for low-income families is a concern in Hoboken. According to the five-Year Plan for Fiscal Years 2007–2011, 427 families were on the waiting list for public housing in Hoboken, with 77 percent of those reporting extremely low income. Also, 618 families, with 79 percent extremely low income, were on the waiting list for Section 8 housing (Housing Authority of the City of Hoboken, 2012). At the start of 2013, both waiting lists were closed. There is already a greater need for public housing than there are available units. With any future plans to rebuild public housing in Hoboken, the availability of funding and the process of demolition and relocation must be transparent.

If all elements of a plan such as the Vision 20/20 Plan were enacted and the directive to not displace anyone was ensured, it would certainly be an improvement for residents who expressed a desire for high-quality housing. This would have the potential to improve their quality of life and decrease to some extent the separation that exists in Hoboken between the HHA and the rest of the city. However, there should be serious concerns about assurances of housing for current public housing residents and funding for completion of this plan. Also, if the purpose is to create a community for people from

different socioeconomic backgrounds that promotes socioeconomic integration and SES mobility, then carefully designed efforts for community building among residents should be enacted for maximum impact. Recreational facilities and amenities in the community would help to bridge divides between higher-income residents and public housing residents, but there should also be opportunities for more meaningful interactions, such as potlucks, neighborhood associations, and cookouts (Joseph, 2006). In addition, wrap-around services and case management should be provided to HHA residents to assist in the transition and to meet the goal of economic mobility.

A few focus group participants explained their concerns:

Participant 3: I feel their master plan is to get rid of all of this.
Participant 2: No, that definitely is, because they're getting rid of us in about 5 to 7 years…They have a plan to knock the projects down. They're going to give vouchers and Section 8 to those who are willing to take it. Otherwise, whether you're willing to take it or not, your apartment will be gone.

Another HHA resident, a mother and grandmother who has lived in HHA for 35 years, when asked how she feels about the plan for public housing, said,

Participant: I hope I can get in there.
Interviewer: If you can get in then you'd be happy with it?
Participant: Yeah, but that's rich people apartments.
Participant: Do you go to Panera?
Interviewer: Yes.
Participant: On Washington?
Interviewer: Yes.
Participant: I was there having a cup of coffee all by myself, all of a sudden these three persons sat down, they don't know if I speak English or not and I heard all of the conversation.
Interviewer: And what were they discussing?
Participant: That it's going to be rich people.
Interviewer: Do you know who they were?
Participant: They don't know me.

Conclusion

Across the country, just as large public housing projects are being broken up or privatized, so are large urban schools (Lipman, 2011). In cities such as New Orleans, Newark, and Memphis, charter management organizations are being given district schools. This is not the case in Hoboken, where there are no known proposals to shutter the district-run public schools

and charter management organizations are not opening charter schools that target low-income children, as they are in cities such as Chicago and Newark. However, the three independent charter schools in Hoboken are attracting advantaged parents, and Washington School is segregated.

Publicly elected officials, school administrators, and community members must embrace the idea of a neighborhood school at Washington and use a community school model, but they must also work to make the school reflect the current demographics of the whole neighborhood. These changes can be made within the current neoliberal school agenda without closing neighborhood schools. Parents from a variety of backgrounds must be drawn to Washington by programs that appeal to the advantaged and public housing residents so that both groups will feel that their children fit in. Advantaged residents must be given an offer that they cannot refuse, such as performing arts or Montessori programs at Washington. This could result in within-school segregation but, if carefully implemented and monitored, it would help to remove the stigma from Washington for the advantaged and for the children who currently attend the school. They must do this while supporting and working with all parents equally.

The de facto segregation in the Hoboken schools is certainly happening elsewhere (Carlyle, 2012; Orfield, 2001; Richmond, 2012; Wells & Crain, 1997). If charter schools become a way for middle-class families to move into affordable "edge" neighborhoods and to avoid district-run public schools by creating their own schools in their community, this will happen all over the country, enabling expansion of gentrification and supergentrification and continuing current school segregation. To stem the tide of inequality in Hoboken, the charter schools must be given mechanisms such as universal enrollment to allow for diversity creation.

The findings demonstrate empirically that, through gentrification, public housing residents can experience benefits, but it will take more than spatial integration through gentrification to improve their actual educational opportunities. Reformers and policymakers must work within the current neoliberal system to fight for low-income families of color who, too often, are not seen as ideal customers or given real choice in the "free market" that is so valued in neoliberalism. As imperfect consumers of education, they are not treated as desirable customers and marketed to and they lack exposure through social networks, leading to a lack of information about school choice. Their lack of economic capital and flexibility constricts the choices of which they are aware.

Developers, who are all too keen to develop properties in Hoboken and other gentrifying or gentrified areas, should be required to set aside units to create socioeconomic diversity (for too long they have not had to do this) and to build amenities that will integrate, not segregate, the community.

Public housing must be maintained, even as gentrification surrounds it. Without public housing, the same families that are not winning in a winner-take-all school system will keep losing when they are faced with housing shortages and a private market place that is averse to providing affordable housing (Smith, 2000). As one of the HHA resident mothers put it, the system will continue "catering to the—not even so much the middle class; everything is upper class."

The findings in this study are context specific. Others can determine whether or not comparisons can be made to similar cities or communities. However, the findings in this study can inform research and policy implementation because this case study illuminates important issues empirically, in depth, and from a perspective that is not frequently promoted and adopted.

Places of Hope

While this story might sound negative, the story in Hoboken is not one of despair. As the stories of Luis and Olivia point out, it is complicated, but there is hope that this community can come together. The demographics are such that advantaged families would have to take very little perceived risk to make significant changes. There is enough economic, social, and cultural capital to go around in Hoboken. With a program such as the proposed *Neighbors United*, there could be formalized methods to share this capital and the educational opportunities that it brings.

Also, there are areas where Hoboken's story is more positive than that of other cities. Hoboken has high quality universal preschool for three and four year olds. Also, it has not succumbed to the now all too common neoliberal education bashing/closing of schools and hiring of outside consultants (Ravitch, 2013). The charter schools in Hoboken are academically successful, the district public schools are still intact, and public housing remains.

During one of my interviews a white advantaged mother exclaimed, "I love diversity!" While this carries a certain irony in a community that is overwhelmingly wealthy and white, it is a common sentiment in gentrified or gentrifying communities. We most definitely do not live in a postracial society, and the choices that residents in Hoboken make in terms of education and housing are influenced by race and class. But in a city where advantaged citizens clearly view diversity as a positive, there must be some potential for educational integration and the creation of a model urban community

Epilogue
Living with Contradictions

After graduating from college in New York City, I was faced with the harsh reality of the New York City real estate market on a public school teacher's salary. In the ten years that followed, I lived in four neighborhoods, all of which could be considered gentrifying or gentrified. I have never lived far from public housing. The only way that Manhattan, or its bedroom communities, were affordable for me was to live in the shadow of public housing. I have enjoyed these neighborhoods and the diversity that is present in them.

However, after my daughter arrived three years ago, I quickly realized that I would soon lose the role of objective observer that I had enjoyed in studying urban education. I now have to face the same realities and decisions faced by those whom I have researched (and in some ways judged) during my years of studying education policy and working in urban public schools.

In Akron, Ohio, where I grew up, white and upper-middle class, I attended a large urban public high school that was racially and socioeconomically very diverse. While there was a degree of in-school segregation, there were also many diverse social networks. This diversity was possible in a large part because of the specialized programs that the school offered. I had transferred to this public school from a private school to be a part of the performing arts program. I knew others, from backgrounds like mine, who attended this school for the International Baccalaureate program, performing arts program, or the championship swim team. The school now boasts an engineering program, which my nephew will enter next year. While I cannot pretend to understand the experiences of students at the school from backgrounds different from my own, I enjoyed my high school experience and in large part believe that it was the informal education that I received there that led me to pursue education and to focus on young people from low-income backgrounds.

It is with this mindset and personal experience that I approached my daughter's entrance into public preschool in Hoboken. On the day of the

Abbott public preschool open house, I visited possible preschool sites with a friend who lives nearby and a group of other advantaged mothers.

First, I visited a site that I knew was popular with advantaged parents. The security guard greeted us warmly, mentioning how she will take care of our babies. The overwhelmingly white advantaged student body was evident at first glance. The students in the first classroom were excitedly playing at stations related to a doctor/hospital theme; next to me were children at the x-ray station.

We then visited the site nearest to my home, in the neighborhood elementary school that many families from public housing attend. I live very close to both sites but slightly closer to the neighborhood school—the two preschool sites are only three blocks apart. The schools, as part of the *Abbott* program, have the same curriculum, certified teachers, school day, structure, ratios, and support staff.

When we walked into the other school, the neighborhood school, a class of elementary school students was walking by and we heard the security guard bark angrily, "Look straight ahead!" as one student meandered in the direction of a fish tank. I looked at my friend, a former teacher in a progressive charter school; she just shook her head and said, "I don't like that."

I knew immediately that few if any advantaged parents would consider this preschool site for their children. The facilities were arguably superior to the other site but the student body that we observed was entirely children of color. When we entered a classroom, an unfortunately placed sign read "obedience school." One disturbed mother asked if that was for the children. The school tour guide quickly replied that it was in fact for the animal theme and that the children were being veterinarians.

This unfortunate visual of black and brown children in obedience school and white privileged children as doctors, although just an inaccurate and fleeting visual, is representative of the larger uneven opportunities in these children's lives. The other advantaged parents with whom I spoke that day said that they would not be listing this site as a preference for their children, although for many of them they would walk by it every day to leave their children at a different site.

I was faced with a choice as a researcher and a mother. While I wanted to choose the neighborhood school for my daughter because of my beliefs in diverse schools, I had reasons for concern. My daughter had been in "school" (day care) since she was five months old. Her day care in Hoboken was wonderful; she thrived and loved it. However, it became too great an expense for us, so we found a more affordable option in nearby Union City. At her new day care, many of the students were there on vouchers and were from low-income families. My daughter was one of only a few white children, and I was one of the few non-Spanish-speaking parents.

While the facility was safe and educational, we quickly noticed differences in our daughter. The more structured style of the school and the discipline were opposite of her old day care setting. Rather than positive reinforcement, students were constantly sitting on their hands in time out. Students (all under three years old) had to sit in their seats for a large portion of the day and were not allowed to roam the classroom, as they did in Hoboken. She began to yell angrily at her stuffed animals at home: "You are in time out, you are not a good girl." I heard her teacher tell my precocious and verbal daughter that she was "too smart."

While I believe these teachers, like her teachers in Hoboken, cared deeply about the children, they struggled much more with classroom management. Their techniques, approved by the day care owners and implicitly by the parents, exacerbated the issues. Many evenings I had a pit in my stomach as I heard from her teacher about her being bitten, or worse perhaps, biting another child. She was hitting and scratching. The teachers seemed to think that it was a "problem" when the children did this, rather than normal toddler behavior. Their reactions appeared to escalate the issues in the classroom. Her body tensed when we entered the day care setting and she showed other physical manifestations of discomfort.

We gave it six months. Looking back, that was probably six more months than we should have given it. But, like many of the families in my research, our options were constrained by finances. It is extremely difficult to know that you cannot make the choices that would be best for your child because of finances while you are working hard. This was just a small insight for me into families like Luis's family, whose choices are far more constrained than ours.

My story is not Luis's story. When my father, a pediatrician, heard some of these details, he offered financial support that allowed us to put her in a "nanny share," and her behavior improved drastically. The nanny laughed at the way my daughter spoke (that she had learned from her old day care). But in just a month, that behavior completely faded and my daughter was behaving the way she had before this experience. A few months later she attended a private camp in Hoboken and had an enriching experience without one negative issue. This was a reminder of the power of economic capital and generational wealth to improve educational opportunities and outcomes, for even the youngest children.

As I thought about which preschool site preference to put on my sheet, I thought that sending my daughter to the neighborhood school would not make it a diverse school or give her a diverse school experience. There was not a convenient option for my daughter that was sufficiently diverse for me. I could try to form a community group of advantaged parents who would send their children to the neighborhood school. I thought that it would take

just a few families to try to integrate the school to benefit all of our children. I have certainly researched these efforts in other communities.

Then I thought of that security guard and the many interviews that I had done with parents of children in this school who stated how happy they are about the increased discipline in the building. My white middle-class progressive instincts may not align with the preferences of these parents. Creating an integrated school that would please all parents would be a major challenge—one that a mother on the tenure-track job market, working full time, with no extended family to help with child care, a tight budget, a book to complete, and a commute did not see as realistic in the few months before preschool preferences were due. Integrating the district schools did not seem to be a pressing priority of the school board or the parents whom I had met during my research. In fact, many district school advocates who live farther from my neighborhood school were unaware of this issue.

I thought about the families from public housing who actively choose that school for their children for reasons of preference and convenience. Who am I to argue that some of them should be switched to a different school? I asked friends for advice. One middle-class black mother/educator from a nearby suburb rolled her eyes at me and said something along the lines of, "You know what to do. This is not about you, it is about your daughter."

In this decision, I learned to live with contradiction and selected the other school. When the letter came that she had been placed at my first choice school, I was thrilled—then disgusted with myself, and ultimately relieved. I was not going to complain and have her school switched if she had been placed at the neighborhood school and she might have had a great experience there. But the thought of risking any more time in an educational environment that could possibly be similar to the one that she had experienced in Union City made me nervous and sad. My husband and I have spent our careers working with first-generation socioeconomically disadvantaged students. We will continue to serve those students and promote positive systemic change for these young people. But when it comes to this choice, I have to live with contradiction.

If I am not going to work for this, then who will? This is the first of many hypocritical moments to come in my career. Already, interview subjects ask me if I will be applying to the charter schools for my daughter. I am certainly not the first academic to be faced with these contradictions when it comes to my own child. However, I hope that I have not lost sight of the goal for all children and that my deep understanding of the decisions that parents make in this community has allowed me to be an equal-opportunity subjective researcher and writer.

I ask that those in this community (or others like this one) come together to create programs like Neighbors United that I propose in this book. It is my hope also that a universal enrollment system and collaboration between the district and charters could create truly diverse high-quality educational options.

There are not heroes and villains among the parents in Hoboken, or the school founders. But our actions carry great consequences for the future opportunities of the children in our community. Those whose choices are constrained by finances and life circumstances often have to take the greatest risks in educating their children, even while having the least choice. As one interviewee pointed out, we have to stop thinking about just our child and think about all children. Yet, as a parent (with a child who will most definitely want to meander towards the fish tank, and probably talk to the fish and name the fish), how do I make that choice for my family?

I wish that my daughter could have the opportunity to attend an integrated local middle-class public school, where she could have diverse social networks like I did and learn from people whose families look different from hers, while receiving an excellent education. Unfortunately, right now, there are not many of these options available. Schools are becoming *less* integrated in urban America.

If public housing in changing urban neighborhoods is defunded and/or dismantled, there will be fewer opportunities for this integration to occur and there will be less affordable housing not only for low-income families but also for middle-class families like ours.

We cannot abandon the promise of school desegregation, but it will not occur on its own. Without housing policies that support, maintain, and grow socioeconomic diversity in cities and without programs that appeal to a wide variety of parents and mechanisms for the creation of diversity, high-performing desegregated middle-class schools will remain elusive for most students.

Notes

1 A City Divided?

1. This is my term, which I use throughout the book to refer to neoliberalism (the reliance on the free market, competition, and the private sector) combined with the lack of egalitarianism (belief in social, political, and economic equity.)
2. *Advantaged individuals* are defined in this book as middle- to upper-class residents who have college degrees and/or a partner who has a degree, who own or rent market-rate housing in Hoboken, and who were not born and raised in Hoboken. While the great majority of these advantaged individuals who participated in this research are white or Asian, there are certainly also non-Asian minorities in this category in Hoboken. *Low-income residents* for the purpose of this research are residents who live in public housing; all of those Hoboken Housing Authority (HHA) residents who participated in the study were black or Latino, but this is not the case for all HHA residents.
3. In the literature *gentrifiers* are frequently referred to by expressions such as "yuppies" or "gentry" or "advantaged." Although not a perfect term, *advantaged* is used here to describe the predominantly white middle- to upper-class Hoboken professionals, usually in their mid-twenties to forties. *Advantaged* will include those sometimes referred to as *new gentrifiers* or *family gentrifiers*; that is, they have children. I deliberately do not use the term *gentrifiers* because most advantaged individuals whom I encountered had moved to Hoboken after gentrification had occurred. I do not use *yuppie* because the term has a history in Hoboken of being used as an insult, and I see it as a divisive term (see Barry & Derevlany, 1987).
4. The *Abbott v. Burke* (*Abbott*) school finance equity case resulted in a progressive set of reforms and parity for 31 urban "Abbott Districts" in New Jersey. Hoboken was one of those districts.
5. There is overlap in these numbers as a participant could be in two categories (e.g., both advantaged and a charter advocate).
6. A word about equating *race* and *class*. Although all non-Asian minorities in Hoboken certainly do not live in public housing and are not low income (I interviewed advantaged residents who self-identified as Latino and/or black), every participant whom I interviewed in HHA identified as a non-Asian minority. Census data show that race and class are related in Hoboken, where the median household income in a white household is $102,920, in a

black household is $43,000, and in a Latino/Hispanic household is $29,679 (US Census Bureau, 2013).

3 Uneven Opportunities: Luis and Olivia

*Pseudoymns have been used in this chapter and some details have been changed throughout the description or kept purposefully vague to protect confidentiality without undermining the narrative.

4 School Choice and Segregation in a Mile Squared

1. I generally focus on King as the public school of preference for the gentry; for the most part, this seems to be because Roosevelt is so small (one class per grade) that many gentry do not see it as a realistic choice. In fact, one gentry parent said that she did not want to put Roosevelt as her first choice because she assumed that she would not get it and was afraid that her child would then be placed at Washington, so she and her friends requested King.
2. I interviewed one born-and-raised white Hoboken mother and one African American gentry mother who had never applied to the charter schools for their children. These two women were not advocates of charter schools from a philosophical and/or policy perspective and were very committed to public education. Both were politically involved and their children attend(ed) King and Roosevelt. One explained tellingly:

   > I also know that there are just some children that will never have the benefit of parental choice because for whatever reason their parents aren't involved. And so that child will never have, you know, that choice, and they have to be educated in a public school system. Therefore, every time we pull our children out, we're leaving those children. So either I could afford to pay for private school or she was going to public school.

3. This ranking was based on three factors: school environment (class size, student/faculty ratio, faculty advanced degrees, and advance placement courses); student performance (standardized test scores); and student outcomes (graduation rates).
4. This was determined simply based on a ratio of families with five- to nine-year-olds and families with zero- to four-year-olds, using 2010 data.

5 The "Golden Ticket": Gentrification, Charter Schools, and a Parallel School System

1. For the purpose of this study, I also examined the proposed fourth charter school that was not granted a charter but was in the application phase while this research was conducted.
2. During data collection, their elementary school building suffered extensive damage from a fire, and the students have been attending school at a former Catholic school in Jersey City, going by bus. Their buses boarded outside my daughter's day care center at the same time that I dropped her off.

3. The only exception was the only HHA parent interviewed because her children attended charter schools. She had transferred two of her children from one of the charter schools to another because she thought that the first school was not a good pedagogical match for her son.

6 "The Best Place to Get a Mocha": Issues of Access for Youth in Public Housing in a Gentrified Community

1. Gentry families who participated in this study called this park by its official name, Church Square Park, while public housing residents referred to it as Fourth Street Park.
2. This interview took place while Mama Johnson Field was closed for renovations; it reopened in fall 2012 and was then damaged by Super Storm Sandy.

7 Separate, Different, but Not Isolated: How Youth in Public Housing Relate to Their Gentrified Community

1. The maps had to be re-created for reproduction in black and white in the book. These replicas were created to match exactly those done by the youth participants and all wording and locations are exactly the same. Map recreations by Te-Sheng Huang, 2014.

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